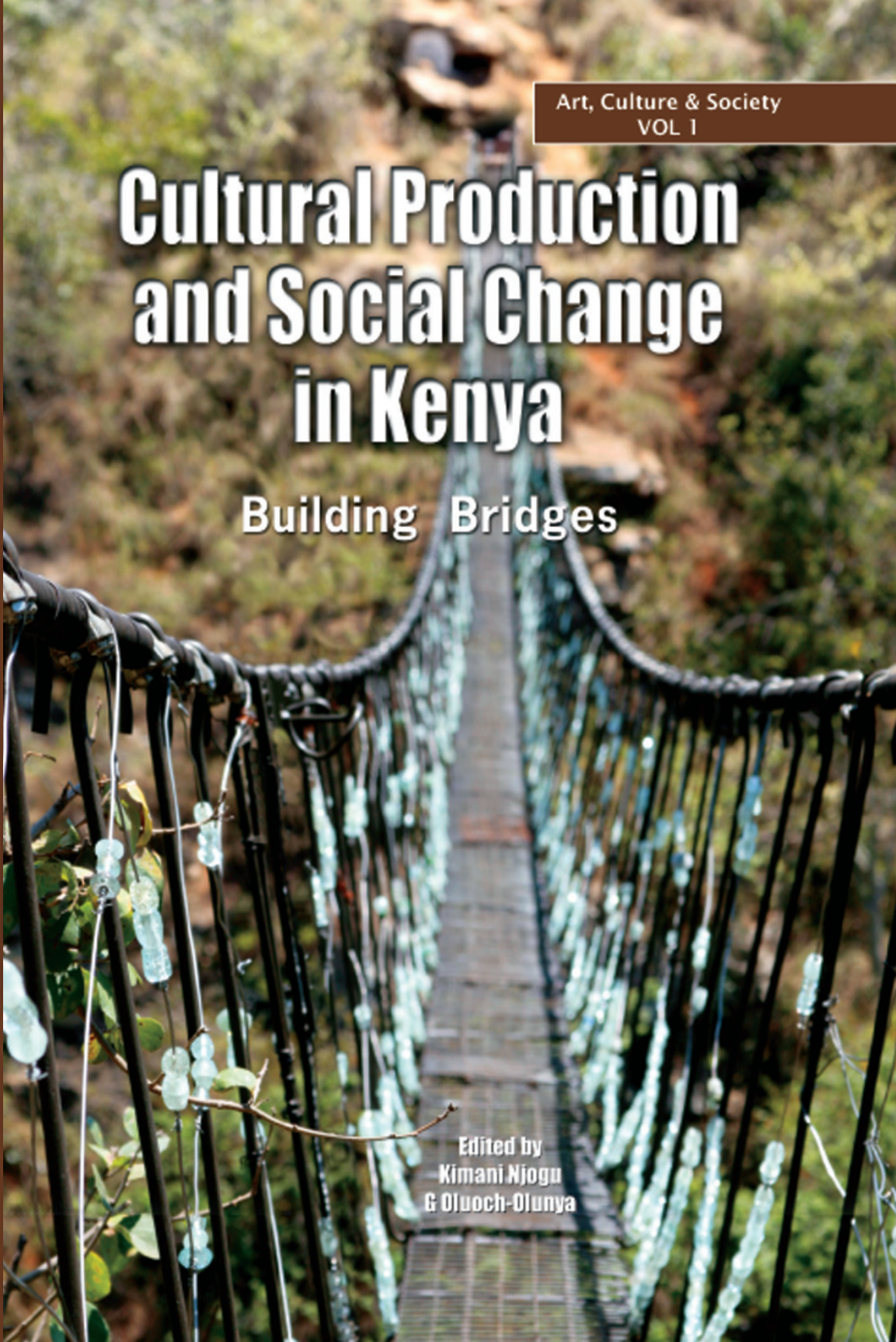




Art, Culture & Society
VOL 1

Cultural Production and Social Change in Kenya

Building Bridges

Edited by
Kimani Njogu
& Oluoch-Olunya

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*With the support of the Ford Foundation,
office of Eastern Africa*

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the late Ousmane Sembene (January 1, 1923 - June 10, 2007), a Senegalese filmmaker and writer who contributed immensely in Africa's post-colonial cultural awakening.

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The hard working team at Twaweza Communications deserves gratitude for organizing the Linkages Workshops, various follow up activities and for carrying forward the cultural leadership agenda. I am grateful to Catherine Bosire for typesetting the manuscript and designing it to completion. We thank you, the reader, for taking the time to read this book. We hope that you will find some insights between these pages.

This book is part of the leadership work being undertaken in Kenya by Twaweza Communications. Whether it is to develop cultural leadership through *Jahazi: The Culture, Arts and Performance* Journal, interactions between academicians and art practitioners, the development of Kiswahili, networking with the media, mentoring younger scholars, or engaging with political parties in Kenya to assemble viable platforms, Twaweza Communications is surely making a difference in the conceptualization and realignment of leadership in Kenya. We would like to thank all those who make our work possible.

Kimani Njogu

NAIROBI.

Introduction

The *Art, Culture and Society* series brings together important reflections on the arts in Kenya. It is a major step in encouraging dialogue on the relationship between creativity and the human condition. Volume I is a consideration of cultural productions and social change in Kenya. Creativity in this Volume is seen as an attempt to build bridges between individuals, communities and disciplines. Coming as it does after the launch of *Jahazi*: a culture arts, and performance journal edited by Bantu Mwaura and published by Twaweza Communications, the book is an additional effort to engage knowledge as it is generated from the 'periphery'. In *Jahazi*, we seek to open discussion between art practitioners and academicians through a sharing of experiences. In the book, we take the discussion further and attempt to theorize the artistic creativity coming from Kenya. In a sense, there is a dialogic relationship of mutual reinforcement between the Journal and the book.

The publications are propelled by the premise that art has a critical role to play in society, because it is, itself, a social phenomenon. The artist, as a social being, and the product of his/her creation function as bridges between the artist and the larger society. Additionally, art affects those who bring it forth as well as those who consume it. It can contribute in the affirmation or negation of beliefs, attitudes and values. This essential human experience gives us the window through which we can see ourselves and the world around us. In the era of globalization, the artist sees more than his/her immediate environment. Equally, the consumption of the artist's creative product transcends the immediate context and may consequently affect others based elsewhere.

Art is affected by social influences and it equally influences society; sometimes in fundamental ways. Although art tends and approximates a universal world, it is based on particularities. It must have a ground on which to stand. The artist's interpretation of their world is determined by such factors as the artist's philosophical orientation, history, and the context of production. As a creative person, the artist is able to inject their own innovativeness in the process of assembling the product. As critics of cultural

and artistic productions we are also driven by the social and historical ground on which we stand. This is not to say that art is reducible to its ideological components. Neither do we seek to imply that the value of art is equivalent to the value of its ideas. Beyond the ground on which the work of art stands, it lives on because of its essence as art. It transcends time and space and, in a sense, prefigures human destiny.

In the recent years, the world has witnessed political, economic, social realignments; migrations and displacements; and the amazing development of an across- borders communications network made possible through advances in technology. There have also been reassertions of particularities, especially through cultures, languages and the arts. We have for instance seen the emergence of global art produced by travelling artists who create and exhibit their works as they move along. These travelling artists bring with them new experiences and new interpretations of the world.

The present global situation demands a way to conceptualize and theorize an ever growing cultural interconnectedness, sometimes manifested in art; an interconnection that draws from a myriad of cultures and experiences. The art that is coming out of the interlinking of cultures and worldviews has traces of “Otherness” represented at different points. Kenyan art, for instance, shows traces of Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

The interconnectedness that results from the process of globalization is not smooth and uncontested. It is celebrated as a site of resistance, protest and negotiation which attempts to valorize polysemic voices from the margins. Contemporary artistic productions from Africa are manifesting this hybridity of experience in form and content. The tourist industry informs in no small measure the type of music, crafts, and clothing that will come out of the Maasai community, for instance. Equally, the exposure of Africa to Asia and America will be of interest, no matter how minimally, to the artists located in Los Angeles and New York. This creolization of artistic productions resulting from contact and negotiation suggests that when a cultural expression, or commodity is recontextualized or localized new hybrid meanings and values are assigned to it. We are made to witness the refashioning of cultural productions and expressions from different countries, cultures and ethnicities. Through the bridges of contact and cultural exchange distant images are mediated and brought closer to us, not necessarily in their original form. The separateness and boundedness of culture is contested and dialogized.

In the contemporary world, it is difficult to talk about an autonomous and internally coherent authentic culture.

Boundaries between local and global have been immensely porous especially due to recent advances in information technology. Flows of meanings and cultural objects are exported and imported; imported culture is adapted, translated, negotiated and integrated into local meaning. New ways of communicating are emerging through the mobile phone and artists are composing music and poetry and saving it on their outboxes as they walk along. The culture of sending text messages has found its way into the poetic genres. In the *Kwani?* Literary Journal edited by Binyavanga Wainaina, a new generation of writers is composing narrative and poetic pieces in a form informed by information technology. Indeed *Kwani?* captures new and emergent forms of speech among the youth and a greater appreciation of style, that is almost globally generational. Hitherto unpublished short story writers are discovering their talent and winning international awards such as the Caine Prize.

It is also important to recognize that the process that leads to cultural interconnectedness is simultaneously a process of integration and disintegration; it is an agent of homogeneity and diversity. The localization of global themes (democracy, good governance, disease, oppression) through specific cultures and languages has the effect of highlighting the beauty of diversity. And this is manifested in art. These events are of academic interest.

In the last decade or so the East African region has seen an upsurge of creative, artistic and cultural works, a kind of reawakening arguably brought about by a more democratic atmosphere. East Africa is home to a range of film festivals such as the annual Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF), Amakula in Kampala and Cineweek in Nairobi. The performing artists and critics celebrate creativity during the Lamu and Bagamoyo festivals, and at the GoDown Arts Centre and the dancing fraternity, including Gaara Dance company, Jok a Jok, Dance into Space and so on are redefining movement, time and space. Additionally, the galleries and visual arts are vibrant. Kuona Trust, the Godown Arts Centre, Ramoma, Medeva and others are creating spaces for young artists to emerge through mentoring. Music, especially hip-hop, rappa, reggae and *mugithi* (the one man guitar) has brought new energies to urban centres. A connection with creativity in the African diaspora is wonderfully manifest. The articles in this book capture some of that consciousness in the diaspora.

Inspite of these advances, it seems to me that there is a disconnect between academicians and practitioners in the arts made worse by the crackdown on Departments of literature in the late 1970s and mid 1980s and the trauma and self censorship brought about by the KANU dictatorship. On the one hand, popular modes of creativity, such as that found in *Kwani?* are looked down upon in some universities and on the other, many arts practitioners do not want to be ‘guided’ by the intellectuals. Binyavanga Wainaina of *Kwani?*, tells Egara Kabaji, a literary critic and lecturer—

“The self appointed gatekeepers (and there are more gatekeepers than producers in Kenya’s literary spaces) are generally useful when it comes to protecting their own intellectual production – which usually focuses on the negation of others to promote themselves. They are usually full of ‘should not’s’ and ‘don’t’s’ and pronouncements of ‘purities’ and ‘authenticities’ – they of course are always perfectly ‘pure’ and ‘authentic’ – they have no place in the hurly burly world of creative production.” Sunday Standard Nov. 27, 2005).

It would seem that Binyavanga Wainaina is seeking for a place in which multiple voices can flourish. It is notable that the acrimonious distance between emerging art practitioners (writers) and scholars as is evident between *Kwani?* and academicians at the Literature Departments in Kenya, especially evident in newspaper columns in the recent past, is as a result of the fact that there has been little dialogue between the practitioners and academicians. The limited scope of newspaper reporting has by and large heightened the acrimony, as has the lack of provision for the academicians to engage new artists and artistic trends in their classrooms and research work. This has further alienated the academicians from the very source of their scholarship. One hopes that the forum being created by Twaweza Communications in *Jahazi* and the *Art, Culture & Society Series* will contribute in enhancing creativity and critical reflection in Africa.

Kimani Njogu
Nairobi, October 2007.

PART ONE

Music

Music, Identity and Swahili Networks of Knowledge

Mwenda Ntarangwi

Introduction

The multicultural nature of Swahili identity has consistently defied any attempts to categorize the Swahili into a distinct ethnic or tribal group. In Kenya today, however, they have had to struggle to be part of a nation-state where ethnic identity is publicly amplified to fit a system that rewards ethnic chauvinism at the expense of multiculturalism. It is in understanding this dilemma that we can begin an analysis of the networks and processes used by Swahili people to enter a global community while struggling to remain rooted within a local national identity. Using taarab music as the unit of analysis, I explore how a community creates and expands social and cultural networks of knowledge to harness multiple politico-economic opportunities. Further, this chapter explores how popular music is an effective tool in the creation of a knowledge and information society, within contexts of competing social, cultural, political and economic realities.

The Swahili are a multicultural community because of their strategic placement in an area where the flow of ideas, material, and people constantly connects them with various cultures and developments in other geographical and social spaces. It is thus no wonder that they do enjoy a high level of international exposure, tolerance for difference, and an accommodative cultural outlook, compared to many other communities west of the coast. Due to this interaction with the outside world, the Swahili had an impressive economic advancement in the pre-independence era when Mombasa and other Swahili towns enjoyed vibrant economic activities. This has, however, changed a lot especially in post-independent Kenya. The Swahili have been struggling to be part of a nation-state where ethnic identity has become an important avenue for political and economic advancement. Indeed, because Kenya's political action and thinking is increasingly revolving around an

ethnicity matrix, most communities are forced to amplify their ethnic identity in order to become integrated into a national politico-economy that rewards ethnic particularity at the expense of multiculturalism. The Swahili are thus at the crossroads of national politics of ethnicity and marginalization on the one hand, and their own reality of multiculturalism and integration on the other. They have watched as their past economic vibrancy has been reduced to a take-over by non-Swahili people as jobs (even those closely tied to Swahiliness as in the case of tourism) have gone to people from “upcountry” (Eastman, 1995).

Yet this economic downturn is not restricted to the Swahili alone but affects many other communities. We live in a world that is remarkably separated by different levels of technological, economic, and political development that in turn produce the dichotomy we now refer to as the industrialized and developing worlds. As we progress into the twenty-first century this disparity becomes glaringly evident especially in the realm of knowledge and information technology. Many countries in the developing world are yet to develop and understand the information age that has now become the quintessential identity of the industrialized world. Information technology in the industrialized world is now a sector that has created a new economy which has surpassed all other sectors in income generation. It is a sector which besides creating numerous jobs for residents of those countries, has also assisted in the breaking down of hitherto traditional boundaries that often separate people geographically, racially, economically, politically and even ideologically. Thus, it is no longer unusual for a native group in the Amazon forest to communicate with its supporters in California who in turn mobilize their colleagues to protest against multi national logging companies at a racism conference in Durban, South Africa.

It is now clear that information technology has the unparalleled potential (when used properly) to empower people; build local capacities, skills and networks; inspire new governance and democratic mechanisms; and reinforce popular participation in economic, political, and cultural spheres at all levels. As the world continually becomes smaller through the rapid movement and exchange of ideas, commodities, and people, the generation, transmission, and use of information will continue to be a key ingredient in the development of a global culture. Indeed, to be part of a global culture is no longer pegged to some political or ideological choices, but is rather a forceful and immediate economic, political, and even cultural reality.

Many cultures, communities, and nations in Africa, for instance, have found themselves forcefully incorporated into the global system by no process of their making. Increasingly, rural communities have had to attempt playing catch up with their urban counterparts who in turn are playing catch up with those in the global North. As Mentan (2003:1) opines, “global communications systems are gaining an increasing importance every day...as nations interact much more frequently and easily...while becoming integrated into the ‘global village.’” The Swahili are part of this global culture but they entered it from a unique position. The Swahili have for a long time been a part of a maritime culture that has been cultivated through increased contact and interaction with cultures and systems very different from their own. In this way, they have been global for many years. Yet they are not technologically advanced to an extent that they can tap into these new information and communications systems that have been favored by globalization. What they have continued to rely upon are cultural networks that allow them to relate and communicate with other cultures outside their locale far more consistently than other communities around them. Since this globalization process is inevitable, it is imperative that each country and/or community gets access, ability and capacity to generate, understand, and manipulate information about social, economic, and political changes and realities for the benefit of its people. Broadly speaking, the ultimate objective is to have a knowledge and information society; one that has the ability, capacity, and skills to generate and capture new and relevant knowledge and be able to effectively access, absorb, and use that information to the benefit of its members (Orville, 2000).

Such an objective although attractive and necessary, has to be considered within the context of poverty, civil strife, illiteracy, disease, and poor infrastructure, all of which have now become the modern day identities of many communities in the developing world. The challenge of such an information and knowledge society is not really in access but in its ability to make information and knowledge relevant for each community. The language of transmitting that information, the capacity to acquire and use it, the creative solutions that such knowledge avails for local problems, and the capacity to adapt to changing information and knowledge systems and structures, are all important facets of that challenge.

It is in view of this that I explore the use and effectiveness of *taarab* music as a mode of communication and transmission of information and knowledge among the Swahili and its ability to generate and support networks of

knowledge exchange. I argue that *taarab* music ought to be seen as a tool for making knowledge and information relevant to the target audience members. Further, by using music as the unit of analysis, I am combining a rich tradition of composition, recording and dissemination of information and knowledge with a medium that has the unique ability to embrace all facets of modern technology. By using Swahili music, one has the opportunity to enter into a culture that has a long tradition of literacy, urbanization, and multiculturalism. It is this multicultural identity that I find equally intriguing and poignant in a country with increased ethnic identity. As an avenue through which to express and understand Swahili identity, *taarab* music avails an opportunity for local trends and sensibilities for articulation of cultural realities.

Swahili Identity in Contemporary Kenya

Scholars have written variably about the Swahili, their identity, and history, but this scholarship has not resolved the ever-elusive question of Swahili identity. I do not anticipate defining the Swahili conclusively in here; instead, I will discuss social and cultural elements emergent from Swahili research, that enable us to see Swahili identity as processual and consequently understand the intricacies of the interaction between their musical practices and the creation of networks of knowledge.

It is not uncommon to encounter coastal people who would generally be identified as Swahili by others but who identify themselves as *Waamu* (people from Lamu), *Waarabu* (Arabs), *Wabajuni* (Bajun), *Washihiri* (people from Shihir in Hadhramaut), *Wamji* (urbanites), or *Wamvita* (people from Mombasa, and specific ancestral claims to the Mvita dynasty) (Ntarangwi, 1998; 2003). Such identifications are contextualized to distinguish Swahili people in terms of social status and descent. Thus the *Waarabu* Swahili will assume a higher status than the *Bajuni* Swahili (Fuglesang, 1994). As I have shown elsewhere (Ntarangwi, 1998; 2003), members of some groups (especially those of the Twelve Tribes) may claim that they are the real Swahili while others, especially the Mijikenda, are considered as only practicing Swahili culture and thus cannot be considered “real” Swahili (Willis, 1993).

Arabic and Indian cultural experiences are notable external influences on Swahili culture today yet an African basis for their social framework remains present (Nurse and Spear, 1985). Much of Swahili social life is centered around Islam and urbanity, with some specific cultural practices and

tenets borrowed from other cultures still very evident in the every day life of many Swahili people. Thus, for instance, Kiswahili has a large number of words borrowed from Arabic and Indian cultures but localized in a way to fit within the Swahili linguistic framework that is clearly African. These cultural influences came at different times and in different trends. Thus one is bound to see a difference in the way the Swahili were influenced by the Arabs as compared to the way they were influenced by the Indians. Arab migrants to the Swahili coast integrated more freely than other groups and blurred any potential distinctions between them and the Swahili. Consequently, unlike Christianity, which expected its converts to abandon their “heathen” cultural practices in East Africa, Islam often permitted a syncretic process such that “traditional” practices were often reformulated rather than abandoned to fit within a partly Muslim cultural structure.

Omani and Hadhrami Arabs engaged in organized migrations to East Africa, and people from India came either as itinerant traders, laborers to build the railroad, or long-term merchants who financed the Zanzibari commercial empire. But the most critical aspect of these migrants from India is the minimal interaction between them and the Swahili in terms of intermarriages. Indian Bohora families in Lamu, for instance, have largely kept to themselves and have not intermarried with local women and men, only mixing with them in business transactions (Fuglesang, 1994:71). This non-mixing between the Swahili and Indian migrants is partly attributable to their religious differences: most Indian Hindus and Jains choose not to intermarry with the Muslim Swahili. The present day Swahili culture does, however, record continued influence from these and other cultures especially in the realm of popular culture. Hence one will often encounter Swahili popular songs that are composed following Arabic or Indian melodic structures and styles. Many *taarab* songs owe most of their musical melodies to popular Indian films often screened in major Swahili towns in East Africa. Indeed, the earliest Swahili musical contact with India was through Siti Binti Saad who made the earliest *taarab* recordings in India in the 1920's.

It is in view of this and other complex realities surrounding Swahili identity that I reject the often tempting totalizing concept of a people or a culture¹ because there is no essential Swahili culture, as each definition remains socially, economically, racially, politically, and otherwise located. The best way to look at the issue of Swahili identity is thus to consider their culture as an ongoing social process (Bruner, 1984) that uses symbols, ideas,

and beliefs that are borne of a process of social interaction and the challenges of everyday life (Ntarangwi, 1998; 2003). This way we can include both micro- and macro levels of social structure and organization. Thus whereas a local community such as that of the Swahili living in Mombasa may develop what we may call a Swahili culture, the organization of that culture will be influenced by, among other things, the political decisions of Kenya's central government, by interactions with and behavior of tourists from Europe and America and visitors from upcountry, and by activities of other international Muslim communities. Further, we may look at such a culture as including elements that need not be shared by all members of the group but rather as the understandings that are socially learned and transmitted and are known to people who consider themselves part of some common grouping (Needham, 1972; Swartz, 1992). It is these elements to which people make reference when deciding on good/ bad or expected conduct, as well as what they may refer to as their tradition or culture.

In an important essay David Parkin states that instead of asking the “now worn” question of who the Swahili are, we

“... may start interrogating the overarching paradox by which the Swahili-speaking peoples of eastern Africa see themselves as members of autonomous communities which emphasize their mutual distinctiveness yet draw on and also inform a chain of differential communal consciousness and custom spanning eastern Africa out into the Indian Ocean and the Arabic-speaking Middle East” (1994:1).

Given the processes of multiculturalism that have produced what we refer to as Swahili communities along the coast of East Africa, it is useful to adopt a definition of a society in terms of this “overarching paradox” expressed by Parkin. This is because people who identify themselves as “Swahili” may often feel marginalized in a country in which the sense of a national identity has grown in clear opposition to a Swahili ethnicity (Parkin, 1994:7) and thus their identities often become transient and shaped by the ever-changing politico-economic sphere. But then there is another twist to this identity complex. In the context of a heightened sense of ethnic (tribal) identity through political leadership in Kenya and the distribution of ministerial posts in the Kenyan cabinet, the Swahili who lack such an ethnicity are often identified through Islam. This is not helpful either because in Kenya where the majority of the population and political leaders openly display their Christian allegiance, the Swahili continue to feel marginalized by being defined by their Islamic faith. A look at their music also reveals this complex nature of their culture

and identity. Indeed, their music has served as an important avenue through which they have been able to reach out to other cultures that may otherwise be reluctant to embrace the Swahili lifestyle.²

Swahili Music Today: Creating a Cultural Context

The period between early 1980's and the late 1990's witnessed ethnomusicological research among the Swahili that progressed from an analysis of musical practice as a distinct social phenomenon (Campbell, 1983) and as a historical performance (Franken, 1986), to a process of localization through women's participation (Topp, 1992), as a language of communication (King'ei, 1992), as political history (Fair, 1996; 1997), as a producer of national culture (Askew, 1997), and as an arena to challenge and reinvent cultural values (Ntarangwi, 1998). A careful scrutiny of these works does reveal a very important aspect of Swahili music—that it is clearly transregional and popular. Indeed, Swahili musical practices like their cultural identity, are a reflection of the complexity that surrounds their social and cultural activities and the meanings they carry. These meanings may not be deciphered by looking only at their local context but rather also by looking into cultures along the Indian Ocean and beyond. Embodying African, Arabic, Indian, and Western styles of singing and composition, Swahili musical styles today cannot fit into bounded categories of definition. Rather, they reflect the contextuality, fluidity, and transformations that have become the defining factor of Swahili cultural activities and processes. These processes and activities are also useful indicators of the networks that the Swahili form throughout the Indian Ocean and beyond. *Taarab* music has been instrumental in these networks and continues to be a useful medium through which we can pursue Swahili social networks of knowledge and identity.

Although we are using *taarab* as part of the Swahili music repertoire we should be aware of regional differences in its structure and organization. Thus Tanga, Mombasa, Zanzibar, and Dar es Salaam have styles of *taarab* that reflect the specificity of their local musical contexts. For instance, Mombasa *taarab* clearly reflects the fast, rich rhythms of local *ngoma* such as *chakacha* and *vugo* performed in and around Mombasa;³ Tanga *taarab* has clear emphasis on guitar rhythms, following the *beni* (brass band) tradition of the area (see Ranger 1975, for a discussion of this music tradition); and Zanzibar *taarab* has a clear emphasis on Egyptian orchestra-style of ensemble with more string

instruments than percussion. In this discussion of *taraab*, I dwell not on these stylistic and contextual differences which may point to different historical developments of the genre in each region, but rather on the similarity of its basic structure that includes the song texts, their meanings, and the contexts of performance that makes it Swahili. Indeed, *taarab* should be seen as an event, a context, and a performance that can be defined only through a situational analysis. The poetry is crucial, the rhythms clear, and the melodies conducive to a Swahili musical context.

Taarab, Identity, and Knowledge Networks

Many communities in the world have traditionally used music to express and/or construct their identities, to create knowledge networks that have aided members of the community to share, generate, and disseminate information. The Swahili have themselves used music to generate, share, and reflect upon their socio-cultural values; they have used music to make contact with communities as far away as those in the United Arab Emirates (UAE); and they have used music as a tool for creating and managing networks of knowledge from within and outside the community. Through these networks of knowledge, Swahili communities have been able to stretch out their socio-cultural tentacles to other communities that have subsequently been instrumental in producing a multi-cultural identity that the Swahili enjoy today. It is because of these networks of knowledge that the Swahili people have been able to maintain a multi cultural identity, their Islamic faith, and economic and cultural ties across national and geographic boundaries. I am in this chapter using the concept of knowledge network as espoused by Woodell (2001:48) where:

The knowledge network refers to the connections between people based on what they know, how they organize to share what they know, and how they make decisions based on this knowledge. Knowledge networks are often supported by technology, but it is never about technology; it is about sharing, exchanging, illustrating, and taking action. Knowledge networks are human and they are cultural.

From such an understanding of networks of knowledge, it is viable to see music as an important and effective medium that enables a community to record, organize and share knowledge that is crucial to its socio-cultural survival. Various studies of Swahili music have shown its efficacy as a tool for cultural reflexivity (Topp, 1992); as a medium for transmitting cultural values and

national political ideologies (King'ei, 1992); as a social space that allows for the reconstitution of certain cultural values (Ntarangwi 1998) and as a tool for cultivating a national culture (Askew, 1997). It is this multifaceted role that Swahili music plays that makes it an important avenue through which to create and maintain enduring networks. Through *taarab* songs, Swahili communities are able, for instance, to share gossip, fashion ideas, political news and ideologies, economic strategies and issues, and general insights into their contemporary living. In this way music becomes very influential both culturally and politically. Through this sharing of knowledge and information the Swahili are thus constantly reproducing and reconstructing themselves to fit different socio-cultural demands.

Some of the advantages of using music as a medium for creating networks of knowledge are found in its ability to use:

- a) Local language and have cultural relevance
- b) Local modes and structures of transmission
- c) Creative solutions for local problems
- d) Capacity to acquire information and use it for the benefit of its community
- e) Capacity in adopting to changing knowledge systems and cultures

These qualities of music are critical in any community because they are relevant for both individual and community needs and strategies for problem solving. We will now look at each of these qualities individually and discuss how they help the Swahili create networks of knowledge that are critical in their socio-cultural survival in a constantly changing world.

(a) Local Language and Cultural Relevance

Most music is composed to be shared and appreciated by members of a community to which the members belong or feels a part of, and thus using a shared language and cultural content in the music is a very common practice. Swahili music enjoys more than just its community's appreciation. It reaches out beyond its spatial borders to places wherever Kiswahili is spoken and understood. With Kiswahili as the national language in Kenya and Tanzania and used widely in Uganda, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique, Comoros Islands, and Somalia, among other places, *taarab* music thus reaches quite a wide audience. And since all these audiences reflect different socio-cultural

qualities, the music's appeal to them is based upon its ability to have an integrative cultural relevance.

This is not hard to achieve nowadays as the flow of goods, ideas, and people has exposed many cultures to multiple cultural realities of communities located in far away places. Hence the rhythmic composition of *taarab* that includes styles from others cultures including but not limited to Latin America, India, Arabia, Africa, and Europe, does make it an important tool for the propagation of a multicultural identity that the Swahili enjoy. Further, the composition and production of *taarab* music entails a dialogic process involving the artist and his/her community/audience. The artist as a member of that community/audience, becomes an active participant in a process of collecting and learning cultural material—skills, perceptions, and meanings of various experiences—that he/she uses to create the music. Indeed, this material is not the content of the musician's songs but is indeed part of his/her life, his/her individuality and personhood that allows him/her to be part of a community/audience. Music making and consumption is thus an experience of shared belonging that subsequently facilitates a network of shared knowledge in a language that is understood by those concerned. The following song, *Vishindo vya Mashua*⁴ by Maulidi Juma from his CD Mombasa Wedding Special (CD/ORB 058) is a good example:

<i>Kuna mengi twayajua, tunoona yakijiri</i>	<i>We know quite a lot, that we have observed</i>
<i>Ela haya yakudua, tukayapinga dhahiri</i>	<i>Yet this one we are opposed to</i>
<i>Tokeni lini mashua, ikashutua bahari</i>	<i>Since when did a boat scare the ocean</i>
<i>Naona mwajisumbua, moyo wangu ushuari</i>	<i>you trouble yourselves my heart is calm</i>
<i>Vishindo vya mashua havishutui bahari</i>	<i>A boat's threats don't scare the ocean</i>
<i>Tuijuavyo mashuwa, kiwa iko baharini</i>	<i>The way we know a boat while in the ocean</i>
<i>Japokuwa yenda sawa, huwa iko hatarini</i>	<i>Although moving well, it is always in danger</i>
<i>Kura itakavyokuwa, bahari huwa makini</i>	<i>Whatever happens the ocean needs attention</i>

This song is basically about a boat in the ocean and the message is that no matter how much the boat moves and rocks, it does not shake the ocean. The ocean is so strong that the boat's presence in it is of no consequence. The use of a boat and the ocean does speak to coastal cultures across the Indian Ocean where maritime culture is vibrant. By using these metaphors of the boat and the ocean, the singer is using local cultural realities that his audience members can relate with yet the message is far more complex than that of a

boat and the ocean. It could be interpreted variably depending on the social, cultural, political, and economic positionality of the one concerned.

(b) Local Modes and Structures of Transmission

Most *taarab* songs are composed in the traditional Swahili poetry form that is generally referred to as the *wimbo* genre that denote sung poetry. These sung poems are thus composed in such a way that they have rhyme and meter. Here is an example of a song entitled *Singetema* by Zuhura Swaleh from her CD *Jino la Pembe* (CD/ORBD 075):

1. *Takusema takusema, tasema sitonyamaza*
 Na lawama na lawama, waja mnganilemeza
 Singetema singetema, yamenishinda kumiza

 I will talk about you, I can't keep quiet
 Even if people castigate me
 I wouldn't have talked, I can't take it anymore
- Refrain:** *Mtu lake ni kusema, nami tasema sitonyamaza*
 Singetema singetema, kweli yamenishinda kumiza

 I wouldn't have talked, I can't take it anymore
 A person ought to speak up and thus I won't be quiet
2. *Nakusema nakusema, nasema japo sitaki*
 Penye wema penye wema, wajua hapafitiki
 Singetema singetema, kumiza hayamiziki

 I will talk about you though I don't want to
 Good deeds can't be concealed
 I wouldn't have talked, I can't take it anymore

Both verses 1 and 2 have similar syllables on each line. They have a total of 16 syllables divided into two of 8. Thus we have in the first verse 16 syllables divided as follows:

Ta/ku/se/ma/ ta/ku/se/ma/ ta/se/ma/ si/to/nya/ma/za/

One should also note that the sound **ma** is repeated at the end of every half line in all the verses. The refrain has eighteen syllables in each line and divided into two of eight and ten. This poetry form is very common in much of Swahili composition and has been heralded as the distinct mark of good Swahili poetry. It is also a form that allows for condensed messages that are open to infinite

translations, meanings, and interpretations that are not context or time bound. For instance, in the same song above, one can generate numerous meanings from it. Thus although the song is compulsion to talk about someone, one could choose to interpret it to take up numerous meanings about what it is talking about, why the need to talk, and who is being talked about? In this kind of genre there is an emphasis on texts as the core of the composition, which in turn is in keeping with Swahili people's emphasis on the texts in their music and poetry. Indeed, renowned Swahili poet and scholar, Kaluta Amri Abedi, stated, many years ago, that Swahili poetry is composed to be sung (1965).

Singing poetry is a common practice among the Swahili (Shariff, 1983). Children and adults alike will sing and recite well-known poems and will often relay messages to each other through sung poetry. A person's ability to compose poetry earns them a high social standing among peers and in the larger community in general. The more complex the poems are, especially in the use of metaphorical constructions, the more respect the composer accrues. In this way, many people are able to touch on various social and cultural issues without making direct mention of issues that would be considered inappropriate in certain contexts.⁵ This is why most of Swahili poetry and music lyrics are presented through metaphor and other symbolic tropes. Thus a song such as *Kisu Chako* by Zuhura Swaleh from her CD cited above, could not elicit any sensitive message regarded on its surface value yet does carry a message that is inappropriate in certain contexts:

Ewe fahali wa nyati mbona mambo yamekurema
Ulinipigia goti na kutaka kuniuma
Kisu chako hakipati usiniharibie nyama

Buffalo bull why can't you manage things
You were aggressive trying to hit me
Your knife will not get don't spoil my meat

Maneno ya hatihati hivi leo yashakoma
Unionapo sharuti huwa ushanigandama
Kisu chako hakipati siniharibie nyama

All aggressive speech has today diminished
Whenever you saw me you would not leave me alone
Your knife will not get don't spoil my meat

The surface meaning in this song could be seen as that about a knife that is

blunt that cannot cut meat and hence the singer wants the person bearing the knife to leave her alone. However, if we consider the knife as a metaphor representing masculinity and the penis then the meaning changes and is thus inappropriate in certain contexts.

(c) Creative Solutions for Local Problems

Music, like many other tenets of popular media, has the enviable ability to reflect upon and fit into almost all social and cultural realities of its audience. This is because musical compositions and performances are often improvised to fit the immediate audience sensibilities and demands. And as I have shown in (b) above, Swahili music uses metaphor as a mode of composition which in turn is very important in delivering multiple socio-cultural messages to its audiences. Because of music's ability to transcend agreed upon socio-cultural norms, it has the enviable ability to bring change to a community by making public certain immediate and relevant issues. For instance, in a song entitled *Mbona Mwanilazimisha* by Sitara Bute cited in Ntarangwi (1998:319), the issue of arranged marriages is addressed. Here is an example of a verse from the song:

Jambo la kufurahisha nawaeleza jamani
Milele kumridhisha mtu wake na idhini
Mbona mwanilazimisha nipendane na fulani?

The most pleasant thing I wish to let you know
Is forever to please someone of your choice
Why are you forcing me to love someone?

Jambo la kusikitisha nawaeleza jamani
Mbona mwanilazimisha nipendane na fulani?

The most unpleasant thing I wish to let you know
Why are you forcing me to love someone?

It is not culturally acceptable for Swahili girls to talk directly to their fathers but in this song Sitara takes up that role and bends that cultural restriction to address an issue that is also very sensitive in Swahili communities. Arranged marriage has been constructed in much of Kenya's public discourse as backward and undesirable. Thus such a song is not only bringing to the fore a sensitive community issue but is also articulating a wider national concern.

(d) Capacity to Acquire Information and Use it for the Benefit of the Community

Music making among the Swahili as it is in many other communities, is a collaborative effort that involves not only the musician but his/her audience. Sometimes a musician is approached by a member of his/her community to compose and sing a song about an issue that the person feels is important. The musician could also compose a song based on observations of real life experiences in his/her community. And thus uses the song to comment, castigate, encourage, or share experiences with his/her audience members. Besides the content of the song, a musician may also compose a song following a popular song from another community or country. Indeed, this is very common in *taarab* where musicians often copy musical tunes from Indian movies and Arabic popular music that often find their way into Swahili popular culture scenes. These tunes are thus used creatively to address local sensibilities and experiences.

Further, songs are often used to bring to the audience members' notice, certain political, economic, and social realities and changes or to bring in information about other locations that members of the audience may not have access to. Many musicians are often invited to perform their music in distant places. This experience enables them to become both cultural ambassadors of their communities as well as collectors of relevant information from their destinations which they share with their communities. Thus when a Mombasa *taarab* musician is invited to perform at a WOMAD festival in Germany, he/she is able to come back and share some of his/her experiences with the members of his/her audience who may not have been outside their local community. This experience may also assist the musician in shaping his/her music to include other cultural sensibilities that may subsequently expand the audience base.

(e) Capacity in Adopting to Changing Knowledge Systems and Cultures

When a community's mode of transmitting information changes, music is the first genre to adopt to the new mode because of its flexibility and ability to adopt to changing modes of production and consumption. For instance, when information needs to be collected and distributed electronically, music becomes part of that process as it soon embraces the new tools of recording and transmission. Indeed, when the world discovers new technological

tools, music easily uses those tools to fit its needs. Thus musicians become among the first members of a society to get acquainted with new structures of acquiring and transmitting knowledge because of their use of the medium of music. They are also able to articulate new ways of thinking by blending their experience in other cultures with that of their own. It is no wonder that we may often see musicians as cultural ambassadors who are able not only to represent their own cultures in other communities but who are also able to bring cultural change to their own communities.

As cultural ambassadors, musicians also act as cultural brokers between their own cultures and those from elsewhere. Through musical composition, they are able to blend new ideas and cultural practices with existing ones in their communities in a language and medium that is understandable and acceptable. When school systems slowly reconfigure the sources and means of knowledge in a community—where elders are no longer seen as the only source of socio-cultural knowledge—musicians are able to mediate and explain such changes. The following is an example of a song by Zuhura Swaleh entitled *Tupange Uzazi* (Ntarangwi, 1995), which shows how musicians may become mediators of tradition and modernity:

- Woman: *Nakupa upelelezi bwanangu upime sana*
 Nimekuwaje siku hizi daima nasonona
 Kulea tumbo si kazi kazi ni kulea mwana
- I am telling you this my husband so that you consider it carefully*
 How come these days I am always suffering
 The task is not in the pregnancy, the task is in bringing up the child
- Chorus: *Nikubalia bwanangu na tupange uzazi*
 Ela hilo mke wangu kuliridhia siwezi
- Allow me my husband that we plan our family*
 That, my wife, I shall not agree to
- Man: *Kuwa na wana wawili wengine huwatamani*
 Zaa hata mia mbili tawaruzuku manani
 Sitoweza likubali kula femili pulani
- To have two children makes you need more*
 Give birth to as many as two hundred God will bless them
 I will not agree to the idea of family planning
- Woman: *Bwanangu leo maisha yamekuwa ni matata*

*Nyumba in ya kupangisha chakula cha Kukokota
Kizazi tukifungisha ujue hatutojua*

*Life today has become very hard my husband
We are living in a rented house and food is hard to get
If we plan our family we shall never regret*

*Man: Ndiya hiyo si ya haki na wala siamini
Kwani mpaji riziki ni peke yake manani
Kama kuzaa hutaki kuoana ni ya nini*

*That trend you are taking isn't right and I don't like it
God almighty is the sole provider
If you don't want to give birth, why get married?*

*Woman: Kuoana ni wajibu bwanangu nawe kumbuka
Siniwachie dharubu za kuzaa kila mwaka
Peleleza taratibu kulea ndiyo mashaka*

*Marriage is a responsibility you should remember that
Don't put me through the agony of giving birth every year
If you investigate carefully you will find that rearing children is a real task*

*Man: Bibi hilo situmai sitokubali kabisa
Maadamu tuko hai riziki hatutokosa
Shetani akulaghai ili ufanye makosa*

*I will not agree to that my wife
As far as we are alive we will not lack anything
The devil is cheating you and making you to err*

*Woman: Nimekubali bwanangu wala sitokasirika
Riziki iko kwa mungu hilo najua hakika
Lakini afiya yangu imezidi kudhofika*

*I concur with you my husband and I won't be upset
God provides that much I know
But my health has constantly deteriorated.*

This song, which is a dialogue between a man and a woman can be analyzed from different levels. One could look at it as a song used by the government to promote an agenda for family planning; one could also look at it as a debate between a man and a woman with the former representing tradition and the latter modernity. This last analysis is quite interesting especially given the fact that in Swahili culture, men are seen as progressive, the shapers and keepers

of community knowledge while the women are seen as the custodians of tradition (Ntarangwi, 1998; Strobel, 1979).

Conclusions

I have shown in this chapter that music is a very important medium through which a community can express and shape its own existence. It is a medium where knowledge making and transmission becomes part of a community through the use of local sensibilities and tools. Music is a tool that has been used by many to address local problems while situating them within larger contexts traversing multiple cultures. The Swahili are a people who are constantly shaping their cultural reality through contact with other cultures across the Indian Ocean to the extent of almost not belonging to their nation-state, that is increasingly becoming very ethnic.

In a world that has become almost entirely dependent on technology for knowledge production and transmission, this chapter explores the role music can play as a “technological” tool that enables the production and transmission of knowledge in an otherwise non-technological community. I have thus shown with examples from Swahili popular music—*taarab*—that the music itself, the musicians, and their audience members are constantly shaping and giving new meanings to information and social realities attendant in their communities. By using the tradition of poetry that is creatively woven and transmitted through musical performance, the Swahili of the coast of East Africa are able to stay culturally, politically, and economically connected with their counterparts across the Indian Ocean. It is this connection that has often defined the Swahili socio-cultural identity and consequently isolated them from their nation-state because of their multiculturalism. The Swahili are thus caught up in an oppositional cultural identity that enables them to remain multicultural while seeking to be part of a national identity that highlights cultural exclusivity. Music is very useful not only as an analytical tool for understanding Swahili cultural processes of knowledge networks, but also as a facilitating tool for the Swahili to harness, interpret, and distribute crucial knowledge and information within and outside their communities.

Notes

- 1 My use of “culture” here transcends the often used totalizing concept that sees culture as the limits of a consensus that people share, to include notions of culture as situated versions of continuous productions of how to be, and how to master one’s environment through choice and constraint. In this way individuals are seen as active entities in their own world that is devoid of pre-set rules and regulations that we tend to call “culture.”
- 2 In 1994 a *taarab* musician—Malika Mohammed—was voted the musician of the year in Kenya.
- 3 The word Ngoma in Kiswahili denotes multiple referents including a drum, a dance, or a performance. I use it in this particular context to refer to a musical performance.
- 4 All English translations of Swahili texts used in this article are by this author unless otherwise indicated.
- 5 Indeed, music has been used in East Africa as an effective medium for delivering culturally sensitive messages regarding sexuality in the context of HIV/AIDS as was the case of a song entitled “Mambo ya Soksi” by Tanzania’s popular musician Remmy Ongala. This song uses the metaphor of soccer to warn people against playing soccer (having sexual intercourse) without socks (condoms).

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CHAPTER 2

Joseph Kamaru: Contending Narrations of Kenya's Politics Through Music

Maina wa Mutonya

While discussing Gikuyu popular music in postcolonial Kenya, a detailed study of musician Joseph Kamaru is almost unavoidable. Through an analysis of his songs, which touch on most facets of everyday life in Kenya, Kamaru also demonstrates how popular songs are webs of ambiguity, which can support widely divergent readings. As Hofmeyr (2004: 131) argues, 'the careers of popular musicians will often traverse almost absurdly different positions as performers, chameleon-like, improvise around and explore and indeed dramatize the chaotic plurality of the postcolony'. Kamaru accomplishes this role, especially through his adept use and knowledge of the Gikuyu language and traditions in his songs. This chapter explores the ambiguity of the musician alongside the contradictions of postcolonial Kenya. Cutting with words in this context implies Kamaru's penchant for not mincing words, and the use of words, proverbs and metaphors from the Gikuyu cultural repertoire, while offering a third degree of the politics of the day.

While analysing the songs of Joseph Kamaru, this chapter focuses on the ambiguity of the musician throughout the changing faces of politics in Kenya. Of major interest, therefore, is the musician's use of language and metaphor, and appropriation of the rich repertoire of Gikuyu customs and traditions, which are avenues through which he aptly captures the ambivalences, and contradictions of postcolonial Kenya. Kamaru's songs, as will be seen later bring to the fore issues of identity (class, ethnic groups and communities as well as ethnicities). These songs, thus, are 'representing facets of outlooks, practices and experiences in a world which has ambivalences and contradictions' (Gecau 1993:151). While analysing his songs, this chapter treats them as texts. Text, according to Hanks (1989:95) can be taken 'heuristically to designate any configuration of signs that is coherently interpretable by some community of users'. In this same vein, Fairclough (1992:4) defines texts to refer to 'any product of social interaction, whether spoken or written'. In light of

the above, the common denominator is the social element of texts, which in view of this chapter, is Kamaru's songs. Notes Kwaramba (1997:15):

Texts are not studied as mere end products of literary creativity, but as both end products of social processes and also as potential vehicles for shaping and reshaping these social processes.

She adds that there exists a relationship between language, power and ideology. This paper treats Kamaru's music and his use of language as both a product and resource in shaping social relationships. After introducing Kamaru, the paper looks at his creative efforts during the two ruling regimes of Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi. It becomes crucial, when analysing these songs to fully understand the prevailing circumstances surrounding the production of the song and the singer. I attempt to interpret the song texts, not independent of the extra-textual world.

Kamaru the Musician

Among the Gikuyu artists, Joseph Kamaru ranks among the most prolific and most successful in the industry having recorded at least 300 singles since 1966 with record sales in the order of 500,000. His songs provide a commentary on day to day social and political issues and he is renowned for his skilful application of Gikuyu traditions and customs in his lyrics. Some of his melodies are adapted from tunes that were circulating in the 1930s and 40s. On occasion, Kamaru has ventured into Swahili and English language songs with mixed success. His cassette, *Chiira wa Mama Chiru* contains a wide range of styles from the near-benga "cavacha" to those that have some traditional Gikuyu folk elements underlying them.

Kamaru's popularity has grown over the decades due to his indulgence in issues with a leaning towards the existences and struggles of everyday practices of the people – be it politics, religion, economics and culture. Kamaru has also dabbled in the obscene world. His X- Rated *Adults Only*, designated as folk songs for adults, sounded almost like Gikuyu Kamasutra set to music. The songs are set in a call-response style with Kamaru doing the vocals. The leading lady is also outstanding as she powers out the replies from the girls side. Musically, it has some soft tinkling *benga* guitars with mixed drums and a pinch of sweetly played flute to provide the atmospheric background as the sexy tales unfold. Popular songs in the album include; *Kindu Kia Munai*, *Huui Wainaga*, *Muthunguci*, most derived from traditional circumcision songs from

the Gikuyu community.

One of the music shops on Nairobi's River Road is 'Kamaru's City Sounds' owned by Joseph Kamaru. Since his conversion to Christianity in 1993, Kamaru has been devoted to gospel music but his music dating from about forty years ago is still selling well and stays relevant today.

One of Kamaru's songs from the album *Hits from the 1960s*, *Ndari ya Mwarimu* (The Teacher's Darling) was part of a drama, *Slow down my teacher, you've gone too far!*, written by JPR Ochieng-Odero and performed by ProPerArt Creations in many towns in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania in 2001. The play aimed at increasing young people's awareness of the social issue of teacher-pupil relationships, a unique example of collaboration between a musician and playwright.

Joseph Kamaru to a large extent forms the epicentre of Gikuyu music in the 60s and 70s during Kenyatta's reign. Kamaru has been making hit records since 1967 when he released the hit song "Celina". While there were other popular musicians during the same period, were concerned with other themes, like relationships, culture, urbanisation, religion and traditions. Kamaru seemed to be the only Gikuyu musician who had the courage to use his music to comment on politics. He sees himself as a 'teacher, expressing the traditional values of his culture, as well as contemporary social comment'¹.

Kamaru sees the role of the musician in the society as that of custodian of the community's culture. In most of his songs, he commits his lyrics to enlightening his audience about the Gikuyu culture. In the song, *Mitugo ya Agikuyu*, (The Customs of the Gikuyu) he teaches the audience about the most important aspects of the Gikuyu culture, tradition and customs. The song sounds like a summary of Kenyatta's *Facing Mt Kenya* (1938), where stanza by stanza, he gives out the names of Gikuyu clans, the traditional setting of the Gikuyu house, the various ceremonies of the community, the generations, how meat was shared along gender and age brackets as well as the various traditional dances and dresses.

Latent in these lyrics, however, is an ingenious call for the Gikuyu people to unite against any adversity. In one song, *Ni Maitho Tuniite* (We have just closed our eyes), literally meaning 'we know what we are doing', or 'we are just patient, but we know what is going on' he starts by a question:

Thuraku cingionekire hakuhi na nyumba ri, andu mekaga atia?

When safari ants were seen near your house, what did we used to do?

He replies in the next line:

Twathiururukagiria nyumba na muhu

We would pour hot ash around our houses. (To keep them away)

Then he goes on:

Nitukiharirie muhu tondu mundu uri haria ruguru ni aretotora

Then let us keep the ash ready, because this man in the west is bragging.

This song was produced in 1983 when Moi, the then president decided to ban all ethnic associations to consolidate his power. It was felt that the ban was particularly directed towards GEMA, (Gikuyu, Embu, Meru Association) a strong association bringing the three communities around Mount Kenya region together. Kamaru in the same song advises the people that *Kirinyaga ni imwe* (All people around Mt. Kenya are one people), and tells them to make sacrifices to God of Kirinyaga so that *mbia irumukie nganangu* (the rat does not let loose the straps of the basket). He further warns that '*Ni maitho tuniite, njuki cingiuma mwatu, ni kuri ungirutwo ruboora*', (we are just patient; if the bees come out of the hive, somebody will get stung). Kamaru reminds the community of their past experiences in a very telling proverb:

Ngui itoi ngari, ndikunjaga matu, ihiuragia gicuthi yeterere gikuu

A dog that does not know a leopard won't run away, it will just wag its tail waiting for death.

Such is Kamaru's skilful application of the Gikuyu language, that when suppression of freedom of expression was at its zenith in Kenya, this song escaped the censor's eyes. The linguistic ambiguity, where a song can have several meanings, is the hallmark of Kamaru's music. Prior to this song, songs he composed during periods of national crisis were more explicit, as will be seen below.

His most critical songs were composed during times of political crisis. In 1969, for instance, he composed a song defending President Kenyatta regarding allegations that he was involved in the assassination of trade unionist MP Tom Mboya. The Mboya murder created serious ethnic tensions between the Gikuyu and the Luo, Kenya's two major ethnic groups.² But Kamaru was to make a turn-around six years later when populist MP Josiah Mwangi Kariuki's (popularly known as JM) mutilated body was found in Ngong Forest on the outskirts of Nairobi. Many accusing fingers were again pointed at the

government. When Kamaru released his song, *J.M Mwendwo ni Iri* (J.M, The People's Hero) it was banned by the government. Kamaru had called for the arrest and prosecution of the killers (although, not confirmed hitherto, the hand of Jomo Kenyatta's government is very clear in the murder). D.K Kamau, another well-known musician also composed a song castigating the government over Kariuki's murder. However, after Kenyatta's death, the same Joseph Kamaru, whose 1975 song had been banned released a song, *Musa wa Andu Airu* (The Black People's Moses), that drew an analogy between the Biblical Moses and Kenyatta.

As Haugerud (1995:32) comments, theatre and music invoke polyvalent symbols that may inspire contradictory political actions. Thus, cultural productions, as this chapter argues always, reflect a competition for moral authority in the contemporary political struggles. The argument is anchored in the understanding that a national political culture is a 'loose collection of shifting meanings that are multiply-authored and context dependent. It is the outcome of a constant process of culture production' (Haugerud 1995: 103).

The chapter analyses several songs produced during exciting periods in the history of Kenya. Kamaru's music in the 60s was mostly love songs, such as his hit song *Celina*. This is the song which brought him into the limelight of Kenyan music. It should be noted that prior to this, he had released a song, *Uthoni wa Mbathiini*, which heavily touched on relationships. Over the years though, Kamaru's songs touched on various themes; culture and tradition, history, politics and lately, he has made a complete turn around and records gospel songs. Spanning over four decades now, Kamaru has earned titles from scholars of his music; Douglass Patterson refers to him as the 'King of Kikuyu pop'; Gicingiri Ndigirigi refers to him as the 'teacher of the masses', while listeners of his music have seen him as a 'prophet'. Issues he sings about actually come to pass. I will look at this later in the chapter.

Kamaru's Music during Kenyatta's Years

... [T]he postcolonial relationship is not primarily a relationship of resistance or of collaboration but can be best characterized as illicit cohabitation, a relationship made fraught by the very fact of the *commandment* and its 'subjects' having to share the same living space. Achille Mbembe (1992: 4)

Jomo Kenyatta was Kenya's first president from 1963 when Kenya attained independence till his death in 1978. During these years, I probe how Kamaru's

music goes hand in hand with historical events in Kenya. As seen above, Kamaru's song in 1969 after the assassination of Tom Joseph Mboya was in clear support of the government of the day. Though the colonial legacy is apportioned much of the blame in most political crisis in Africa, Kenya's political problems and cracks in the nation really intensified in 1969. Several events happened then. This was the year that saw the second general elections in Kenya held. The only opposition party then, KPU (Kenya's People Union) was banned and its *de facto* leader Jaramogi Oginga Odinga incarcerated. Ethnic tensions between the Gikuyu and the Luo flared up, and Kenyatta's visit to Kisumu (which was seen then as bedrock of opposition to Kenyatta's rule) was marred with violence. This is the context that shaped Kamaru's song, *Arooma Ka* (May he be stiff dead). In the song, Kamaru rails at those people who were claiming that Kenyatta was too old to rule. He duly warns those that were against Kenyatta's rule:

Arooma ka _ May he be stiff dead
Aroitika _ may he wither
na mahuri make makarirwo Kirinyaga _ and his lungs will be eaten on Mount Kenya
ni tuihu twa mirungaru _ by mongooses.
*Jogoo ya Kanu*³ _ KANU's cockerel (meaning KANU's flag)
Niyo ikwambata iguru _ will forever be hoisted high!

Kamaru, in his song tries to show Kenyatta's popularity from Mombasa to Kisumu, from Ngong to Garbatura. The mention of Ngong here is significant as will be seen later.

Despite commenting on the politics of the day and voicing his support for the ruling party, Kamaru also points to the predator-prey relationship that characterised the tensions between the ruling elite. Drawing on the metaphor of the mongoose, the ambiguity comes out clearly given that the cockerel was and still is the symbol of the party KANU. Mongooses are of the greatest threat to a poultry farmer. They are known to feed on a large number of chicken when they strike. The implication here is that Kenyatta is the main cockerel, and those opposing him are either hens, or young chicken more prone to mongoose attacks. The mongoose metaphor also implies that all Kenyans were chicken, under the rule of the cockerel, and the ideal punishment was to throw them to mongooses, the most common threat to

chicken. The mention of Mount Kenya, the mythical abode of Ngai, the god of the Gikuyu community gives ethnic connotations to the song.

Kenyatta's statement in a speech made in 1975 more or less reiterated the same. Faced with dissent and opposition from his government after the grisly murder of populist MP J.M Kariuki as seen in the next example, and the attempted cover-up, he sternly warned: 'the hawk is in the sky. It is ready to descend on chickens who stray from the pathway' (Miller, 1984: 53). Within a few days, opposition waned but the crisis of Kariuki's death haunted Kenyatta until his death in 1978.

1972 marked yet another suspicious death of a prominent politician. Ronald Ngala died under mysterious circumstances which have not been unravelled up to date. However, Kamaru didn't release a song in 1972, and only did so in 1975 when another famous politician died. In this year, a former Mau Mau detainee and a populist Member of Parliament, Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, popularly known as JM was found murdered in Ngong Forest with his body mutilated. He is said to have been one of the prominent politicians who fronted the case of the landless and squatters in Kenya. He was critical of the government's policy to resell land to the colonial settlers while most Kenyans remained landless. Kenyatta was not amused by his vocal criticism. His death was seen by many as a sign to silence him forever. What would Kamaru release next? He never repeated the mistake he made in 1969. This time, he released a song that was quite critical of the government:

Thirikari tondu Kariuki niakua _ authorities, now that Kariuki is dead
Arutitwo magego na maitho _ with his teeth removed, his eyes gouged out
Na ti kuiya kana kuragana _ and he wasn't a thief or a murderer
Thakame ndigaitike niundu wake _ lets not shed more blood
Rekei Ngai arute wira wake _ let God do His work

The song not only describes the grisly murder, but also asks the government to provide the answers to the death of an innocent man. The song somehow contradicts his earlier song, where he prophesies doom to whoever was critical to Kenyatta's rule. Whereas mongooses on Mount Kenya did not eat Kariuki's body, it was mutilated and left to the hyenas in Ngong forest! Ngong is mentioned in the 1969 song.

The irritating verse that was critical and might have led to the banning of the song predicted doom again to whoever was involved in the murder:

Mumutinia ciiga ciothe cia mwiri _ whoever mutilated his body
Mumutwari muhara ini wa nyamu _ whoever took him to the wild animals
No nginya akagaragario na mwatu _ will be rolled in a beehive
Muingi wothe wa Kenya wireire _ with the Kenyan public watching.

Kamaru invokes Gikuyu customs to send home a message. Criminals in pre-colonial Gikuyu society would be rolled downhill in a beehive as a means of punishment, (Wanjohi, 1997:216). Though the government denied responsibility, all indications pointed to a heavy hand in government involvement. In parliament, when asked to explain the whereabouts of the MP, the then VP Daniel arap Moi (who was later to become president) blatantly lied to the House that Hon. Kariuki was on a business trip to Zambia. Later on, a parliamentary select committee also implicated the government. Kamaru's song was banned on the only national broadcaster, Voice of Kenya (VOK).⁴

The death of Kariuki, a Gikuyu, led to an internal split among the Gikuyu ethnic group,⁵ alongside a revolt against the government in parliament (Miller 1984: 52). But how to interpret Kamaru's turn-around from the 1969 political crisis after Tom Mboya's murder? Having heavily castigated the government and by extension the president for Kariuki's murder, two important events happened in 1978, in relation to Kamaru's music.

On the morning of August 22nd 1978, Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta died at State House Mombasa. Many dignitaries alongside thousands of mourning Kenyans witnessed his state funeral. His casket draped in the national flag of Kenya was paraded along the streets of Nairobi on a horse-drawn carriage. Kamaru's prophecy had come to pass: the murderer of JM Kariuki was finally being rolled in a bee-hive⁶ to the full glare of not only Kenyans, but the world at large. It is at this point that Kamaru's songs were taken seriously, and the prophet tag attached to him.

Ironically, at the time of mourning, Kamaru was at it again. This time, he released a song praising the late president, christening him the Moses of the Black People in his song, *Musa wa Andu Airu*, a reference to Biblical Moses' efforts to rescue the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. Within the Gikuyu traditions, one does not quarrel with the dead. The Gikuyu people 'believe that the spirits of the dead, like living human beings, can be pleased or displeased by the behaviour of an individual or family group, or an age group' (Kenyatta, 1938: 266)

This paper is concerned with the vacillating nature of Kamaru. As Bogumil Jewsiewicki (1997:440), argues:

Often of populist inspiration, research on popular culture emphasises the political critique, the subversive character of the text. Yet it must be admitted that at least as often, songs praise the incumbent regime, conveying its values and transmitting its structure.

That Kamaru both praised and criticised the incumbent and his regime places the artist fully within a role commonly expected of musicians all over the African continent – that of the praise poet (South African) or *griot* (West Africa). Tradition has it that a musician recognised as fulfilling this function is duty bound to publicly highlight both the positive attributes and failings of a leader.

In view of the understanding that relationships in a postcolony are based on mutual zombification, as Mbembe suggests, one can argue in the case of Kamaru that popular arts, in this instance popular music not only are affected by the socio-political realities of the day, but they do affect them as well. The futuristic predictions of Kamaru, as in the song on JM, clearly point to this. It is Karin Barber's (1997:441) observation that buttresses this argument:

Popular arts penetrate and are penetrated by political, economic and religious institutions in ways that may not always be predictable from our own experiences.

Suffice it to say that most songs by Kamaru outlive the event, and have been or can be appreciated not because of their aesthetic value, but on their relevance to Kenyan history. This is what gives them an independent life. Among the oral interviews I conducted, mostly among elderly people, there is always a reference to Kamaru's songs when responding to issues around politics in Kenya.

The Moi Era

In 1982, the government of Daniel arap Moi, the successor of Jomo Kenyatta, faced insurgency from the army. Though the coup was quashed there was loss of life and property, and the politics of the day assumed a completely new dimension. Most of Moi's trusted aides were implicated in the coup and those who survived jail sentences had to contend with their political lives in limbo.

Kamaru's response couched in linguistic ambiguity was in his song, *Cunga Marima* (Watch your Step).

Cunga marima _ watch your steps
Ukigua ndukague nanii _ if you fall down, you'll all be by yourself
Cunga marima _ watch your steps
Na ndukanoige ndiakwirire _ don't say I never warned you
Cunga marima _ watch your steps

Cunga Marima dwelt on the politics of the day. The former Attorney General, and then Minister for Constitutional affairs, Charles Njonjo, was accused by fellow politicians of being behind the attempted coup of 1982.⁷ He was branded a 'traitor' and Kamaru joined in with his song to castigate him:

Huko nicietherwo itati ikwa itanathira _ Let get traps for the moles before they finish our yams
Ciarema ciikirwo maai _ if we can trap them, let us pour water in their holes
Mwendia bururi, niahitwo _ the sellout in our country should be hunted down
Atanabuiria _ Before he disappears

In context, the song was a clear support of the government of the day against those who dared raise a finger against it. As a means of consolidating power, president Moi encouraged a cult of hero-worship:

Besides being the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, head of state and government and the chancellor of all public universities, the president acquired some other titles such as the 'prince of peace', 'number one farmer', 'the chief conservationist', etc. Several institutions and places were named after the president and a culture of hero-worshipping permeated the country's body politic. Sycophancy became the hallmark of the Moi one-party state. (Schmidt and Kibara, 2002: 8)

Kamaru's music would easily have fallen in this cycle of sycophancy. The President appreciated the power of music as a propaganda tool and he used it to the fullest.

The song *Cunga Marima* appears in Kamaru's Album, Kenyan Patriotic Songs, Vol 1. Vol 2 under the title, *Urathi wa Kamaru* (Kamaru's prophecy), released in 1983. Kamaru, however, deconstructs himself. In one song, *Ndeto Iri Na Ene* (Stories have their tellers), he clearly says that his songs are not political and that his trade is just a means of eking out a living:

Mareenda ndigacoke kuina _ They want me to stop singing
Na ringi ndinagira kwenda _ And probably, I don't just sing
Ni nyone gacati ga gwikira _ I want to be able to buy a new shirt
Kamaru, mwaria njarie _ I Kamaru, I only say what's been said
Ngukua ki? _ Why pick a fight with me?

Given that his music is purely in the Gikuyu language, we can argue that his narration of history of Kenya targets his listeners. He constantly reminds the Gikuyu community to unite against any adversity. In the 1980s, Moi banned all tribal associations with a view to consolidating power. So can one say that Kamaru's is Gikuyu history, as opposed to that of Kenya? Kamaru brings us to the idea of the contending narrations of nationhood and struggles over citizenship.

Kamaru's popularity in line with a wide audience across ethnic barriers points to the weakness of such an argument. Keith Negus (1994:121):

Once in circulation, music and other cultural forms cannot remain bounded in any one group and interpreted simply as an expression that speaks to or reflects the lives of that exclusive group of people.

The suspicious deaths of Tom Mboya, J.M Kariuki, the 1982 short-lived coup and the disillusionment with different ruling regimes were not events that only affected the Gikuyu community. Again, it doesn't really matter even if his music appealed to a Gikuyu audience. As long as oppression, anti-democratic and unpopular nuances by any government are practiced, popular music will continue to have a resonance as a signifier of a culture created out of these experiences. The argument that Kamaru only appeals to a Gikuyu audience ignores the significant ideological, political and class differences within the community. Kamaru's song, *Riria Mugutwenja* (When you are oppressing us) points toward this direction.

Therefore, the argument that his music is in some way expressing the unity of a particular group of people must continually confront the apparent disunities and differences that are there in the world. Talking of Kamaru's music across the different ruling regimes, thus, helps in understanding:

under what conditions particular musical codes, signs and symbols become used and claimed as expressions of particular social and cultural identities. The implication here is that music and other cultural forms are just as much part of the making of

cultural identities - the process is not simply one way whereby some fixed identity leads to a particular type of music'. (Negus, 1994: 122).

The Re-introduction of Multi-party politics

With the repeal of the repressive Section 2A in the Kenyan constitution in 1991, which gave rise to the re-introduction of multi-party democracy, it can be rightly argued that freedom of expression received a major boost. Prior to this, Kamaru had released an album in 1990, *Mahoya ma Bururi* (Prayers for the Nation) that was questioning the lack of clear rule of law by the government. Seen as contempt of government, Kamaru was held for questioning by the authorities.⁸ However, his *Ndumiriri Kuri Mbeu Njithi* (Message to the Youth) album in 1992, prior to the December multi-party general elections was a clear analysis of all the presidential candidates, taking a middle-ground stance. In the album, he emphasizes that it is only God who can give Kenya a proper and just leader. In an interview with researcher Gicingiri Ndingirigi (1994: 132), he says that he didn't want to be associated with any political party or leader. This wasn't to be though. Notes Wekesa (2002:12):

At the height of the campaign for the multiparty elections in 1992 ... Kamaru from the Kikuyu ethnic community was seen by the ruling party, KANU, as an important vehicle to deliver the Kikuyu votes. He would appear at [most] rallies in Central Province [the home of the Kikuyu] where he attracted and entertained thousands of people who would probably have had no other opportunity to watch him perform live. His recordings were constantly played on the national radio and television station, KBC.

In a public meeting, however, on October 20th 1992, a national day celebration (Kenyatta Day) to honour the heroes of the Mau Mau struggle, Kamaru told arap Moi, the then president of Kenya and leader of KANU (Kenya African National Union) to his face that he was not the kind of leader Kenyans wanted. The strange bedfellows relationship between him and the ruling party ended then.

In 1993 after the elections and eventual win of Daniel Moi, he produced an album, *Munyongoro* (The Millipede) advising the main losers, Kenneth Matiba of FORD Asili (Forum for the Restoration of Democracy), Jaramogi Oginga Odinga of FORD Kenya, and Mwai Kibaki of DP (Democratic Party) amongst others to accept defeat for the sake of development of the country. He urged them to cooperate, now that the 'cock' had the 'millipede' in its

grip. The use of these symbols is relevant given that KANU's symbol was and still is a cockerel. The song can be interpreted as a rejoinder, to the earlier scathing album, *Message to the Youth*.

Towards the end of 1993, he produced *Kuroga* (To Bewitch). In the song, he assumes a position on top of Mount Kenya (the mythical residence of Ngai, the God of the Gikuyu), seeking advice from the deity. He appears to be bewitching all the leaders who led to the flare up of ethnic violence in the Burnt Forest and Molo regions in Kenya's Rift Valley province⁹ and other areas. He curses¹⁰ the leaders who have stashed money in foreign accounts and embezzled the taxpayers' money. The musician in the song condemns adulterers and warns that those he has not mentioned will be inflicted by the leprosy of the above curse. He advocates for a public meeting where the citizens would decide how they want to be governed, and threatens the government that its people will go to Molo and Burnt Forest to fight the perpetrators of ethnic violence. Goes a line:

The Mau Mau vanquished the colonialist;
We too can stop the perpetrators

In this song, in which the singer speaks against the background of instruments, he takes the position of a preacher, giving examples to buttress his message. Coincidentally, this was his last secular number for in April 1993, he converted to Christianity.

Kamaru, the Convert

For a musician who was known for political commentary, advocacy for Gikuyu cultural revival and sometimes, lewd lyrics, like his album, X-rated *Adults Only*, his conversion to Christianity raises questions worth answering in this chapter. In the years after 1997 especially, the political space was opened up, with the government allowing for dissenting voices. Before then, the public, unlike the artist, could not voice concerns about the way that they were governed. The musician had an upper hand in commenting on politics in music. With the entrenchment of democratic ideals like freedom of expression and association, anybody now could comfortably express discontent in different platforms and fora. The question then is whether musicians really say what they want the audience to hear, or whether it is a question of easier access to power and money. How the musicians tackle the new challenges is a question beyond the scope of this chapter and offers space for new research imperatives.

Kamaru's change of religious status led him to produce gospel music, a trend he has continued. In an article tracking the lure of gospel music amongst many musicians in Kenya, Amos Ngaira (2002) argues:

... [T]he avenues for marketing and selling one's product are wider, from churches to open-air crusades to Christian TV and radio stations over and above the normal secular fora. Lure of vernacular renditions, too, is helping boost sales, with many artistes releasing replica copies in Kiswahili and local languages.

Probably, this accounts for Kamaru's switch to gospel music. However, this is not a topic this paper intend to deal with at this moment. But a crucial analysis of Kamaru's audience is necessary.

Kamaru's Audience

Most of his songs are purely in the Gikuyu language. His music, however, requires critical appreciation. The music is deeply rooted in the Gikuyu oral tradition. The fact that his music spanning over four decades is readily available in music shops in Kenya denotes a wide audience. Linguistic ambiguity is one of the cornerstones of Kamaru's music. His late 1980s release, conveniently named *Adults Only* was loaded with sexual innuendo and bawdy lyrics. The songs became quite popular, but it was only those armed with the proficiency of the language who could understand the lyrics.

Kamaru's use of proverbs especially in most of his songs as well as the linguistic ambiguity sends out messages to his audience, who are subject to interpreting the proverbs differently. Through the use of proverbs, the popularity of Kamaru's music derive from the fact that they are presented in a language and a discursive medium that renders them more available for criticism and discussion. For instance, his song *Chunga Marima* can be read on two levels once we appreciate the several proverbs therein. The song apparently was a castigation of the dissenters of Moi's rule, as we have seen above. On a cautionary note though, Kamaru gives advice to politicians:

Mwaka wa hiti nduhoyanagirwo rigi

When hyenas are in abundance, one doesn't beg for a wicker-work door.¹¹

Signifying the jungle that politics is, Kamaru applies this proverb, which is normally used for counselling, moderation and prudence in generosity. That Moi's trusted aides betrayed him by planning the coup in 1982, the proverb extends help to the besieged, that in politics, it's all about your survival

first.

The proverb, however, derives a lot from the lives of the pre-colonial Gikuyu. Living in animal infested areas, hyenas would at times wreak havoc by attacking people in their homes. The wicker-work door, a kind of a gate outside and around the hut could easily prevent the marauding animals from reaching your home. Since all people would be affected, this wasn't the right time to lend or borrow the door from your neighbour. Drawing from Gikuyu oral tradition points at crucial observations when discussing Kamaru's audience, Wekesa (2002: 9) argues:

People's sense of themselves always come from the use of images, symbols and a wide series of responses which they come to identify with, and which also distinguish them from others.

Given the 1982 context of the song then, the above proverb again can be read as a warning to the Gikuyu community, that they should be self-reliant, especially in politics. Kamaru's vacillation and middle-ground stance is manifest once again.

In the same song he uses a host of other proverbs which, when analysed, reveal this ambiguity. For instance;

Njoya cia njamba ticio cia mwera

The feathers of a cock are different from those of a hen.

Mukia ndoi mwehereri

Whoever is throwing a missile doesn't know where it will land.

The first proverb above again mentions the metaphor of the cockerel and the hen, discussed earlier in the paper but also shows the relationships between the rulers and the ruled, or the differences between the ruling elite.

Just like readers in works of fiction, the audience in music grasps essential features of these proverbs and uses them to interpret their own social experience. As Karin Barber (1997: 357) argues, 'proverbs meaning is never complete until they are applied to a concrete situation.' Therefore, one can argue that a similar proverb can be applied to different situations. Though Kamaru's songs were recorded years ago, the use of proverbs makes them relevant in discussing Kenya's changing politics today. The concerns with the everyday life, be it social or political, has made Kamaru's music appeal to a wide audience across different ages of people born in different periods of

Kenya's political history.

Following his conversion to Christianity in 1993, Kamaru's secular music has enjoyed a greater revival, especially with *Mugithi* artists with their renditions of his songs, and with the proliferation of vernacular radio stations, an indication of Kamaru's popularity in the Kenyan music scene.

Conclusion

What do you think an artist is? An imbecile who has only his eyes if he is a painter, or ears if he's musician or a lyre at every level if he is a poet, or even, if he's a boxer, just his muscles? On the contrary, he's at the same time a political being, constantly alive to heartrending, fiery or happy events, to which he responds in every way. (Pablo Picasso, quoted in Dore Ashton (1972))

The overview of Kamaru the musician in this chapter tends to point to the role of the artist in narrating the history of the nation as well as providing political commentaries. More importantly is the use of language to drive his message home. Metaphoric expressions and allusions leave the audience (whether the government or the citizen) with a license on how to interpret the songs. Couching his music however in the extra-textual (the real happenings in the country) leads one to a conclusion in line with David Harker's (1985:76) position that 'unless we locate cultural products in history, we cannot hope to understand culture'. Kamaru's use of deep language and metaphors clearly depict the ambiguous space the musician operated in. The ambiguity here can be used to highlight how the musician 'expresses the hidden transcript of the ordinary people especially in the 1980s when, because of the political situation, the message was forced to remain implicit' (Gecau, 1993:154).

Seen as a constant threat by the authorities because of a wide audience, Kamaru's vacillating nature over the years was a strategy to cushion him against the wrath of the government. Again, this explains the complex relationship between the rulers and the ruled in postcolonial Kenya. Whereas the musician may claim to be apolitical, it is clear from the analysis of the lyrics that the politics of the day dominate. Whether it's a comment or criticism of the ordinary man or the leader, loud political overtones cannot be ignored. Alongside politics, this paper has also shown that Kamaru's music can be appreciated as a template for rereading the history of the nation. Thirdly, music is seen in the paper as a source of oral tradition, following Kamaru's use of the rich repertoire of the Gikuyu traditions. The politics of production of

music is manifest in analysing Kamaru and his music. The recourse to gospel music after the introduction of multiparty democracy in my view is a search for identity amidst a changing political atmosphere. Secondly, gospel music appears to be fetching more money than secular music in Kenya. The bottom line however is that the musician in his trade has epitomized the role of the artist in the society, as Pablo Picasso's quote above elucidates. To paraphrase John Street (1997:14), music affords an opportunity for people to enjoy and articulate their political feelings. From the pleasures of popular music, people become engaged with politics through the feelings it articulates, the identity it offers, the passions it elicits and the responses it prompts. Music and politics therefore exist alongside each other. From the Gikuyu oral tradition, I conclude with a proverb: *Gutema na kanua ti gutema na ruhiu* [To cut with the tongue (or words) is different from cutting with the sword].

Notes

- 1 See Doug Patterson's 'The Life and Times of Kenyan Pop' in *World Music: The Rough Guide*, 1999.
- 2 After the assassination of Tom Mboya in 1969, there was growing discontent as an accusing finger was pointed at the executive. With the instability looming, Kenyatta and his advisers started administering oaths to the Gikuyu to cement tribal and political solidarity against their adversaries, mostly perceived to be the Luo community. At the oath-taking ceremonies, they swore that 'the flag of Kenya shall not leave the 'House of Mumbi' (Ochieng and Ogot, 1995: 102 and Andrew Morton, 1998:160). The Gikuyu people invoke the name of their mythical ancestors when the community feels threatened. Mumbi is revered as the mother of the tribe.
- 3 KANU (Kenya African National Union) was the ruling party under Mzee Jomo Kenyatta.
- 4 Another musician, D.K. Kamau, produced a song about the brutal murder of J.M. Kariuki. Some of the lyrics pointed to the popular belief that the murder was state-engineered. 'It is rumoured that the musician was summoned to Gatundu [Kenyatta's home] and thoroughly caned by the President, Jomo Kenyatta, which was the late President's preferred punishment for dissent even among his fellow politicians'. See www.enchanted-landscapes.com.
- 5 A popular saying after Kariuki's murder was that 'the hyena's had eaten one of their own', meaning that the legislator suffered at the hands of his own people, the Gikuyu. Again, worth noting is that Kariuki at one time served as Kenyatta's private secretary.
- 6 The beehive here metaphorically constitutes Kenyatta's casket, and the parading of the casket along Nairobi streets could be read as the rolling of the bee-hive downhill.
- 7 What came to be referred as 'The traitor affair' in 1983, months after the failed coup threw a complicated challenge to the country. Charles Njonjo, then the most feared minister in Kenya had 'established an elaborate machinery involving the police, senior

civil servants and the judiciary which provided him with a formidable power base' (Ogot and Ochieng': 1995: 200). After being named the traitor, his power base was dismantled leaving Moi's powers in Kenyan politics unchallenged

- 8 When Kenyan authorities called Kamaru for questioning, he told them his cassette was patriotic. 'I tried to explain to them that I am praying to my people. I am praying to our leaders, praying for my country, so I don't see why you are trying to ban my cassette' (Haugerud, 1995:30)
- 9 See Peter M Kagwanja. 'Facing Mount Kenya or Facing Mecca? The Mungiki, Ethnic Violence and the Politics of the Moi Succession in Kenya 1987-2002'. *African Affairs* 102:25-49 January 2003.
- 10 The Gikuyu used to believe in the power of 'kirumi', 'the curse'. Notes Kenyatta 1938:222, 'the fear of public opinion expressed in the way of curses was the chief preventative of mischief and crimes because there was no police organization in Gikuyu society'. One of Kamaru's songs in the album is titled *Kirumi kia uri muoyo (The Curse of the Living)*, where he warns that the curse of the living is worse than the curse of the dead.
- 11 Translation adopted from Gerald Joseph Wanjohi. *The Wisdom and Philosophy of African Proverbs: The Gikuyu World-View*. Nairobi, 1997, p 165.

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CHAPTER 3

" 'Is Marwa!'¹ It's Ours": Popular Music and Identity Politics in Kenyan Youth Culture

Mbugua Wa-Mungai

Introduction

It is a cold Monday in August on Nairobi's Uhuru Highway. The Government Spokesman, Alfred Mutua, is weaving his way between moving cars, handing motorists a bumpersticker: "I am proud to be Kenyan. Najivunia kuwa Mkenya." With a beaming smile to the cameras, he declares, "I too am proud to be Kenyan." From the expressions on the faces of motorists all around him it is clear that the concern with national pride is received in diverse ways, some of which the government man might not be proud of.²

Intended to serve as a rallying point for patriotism, the import of the slogan cited above, and issued by the Public Communications Office, formed a subject of intense contestation between July and September 2006. A national debate emerged around two issues; first, what it means to be a Kenyan and, second, whether one can really be patriotic in a situation of perceived extreme socio-economic injustices. The debate tended to arouse two distinct sentiments—those indicative of fierce nationalism on the one hand and those that marked a profoundly felt pessimism on the other. The subversive word play "*Navumilia kuwa Mkenya*" [Kiswahili for 'I merely tolerate being a Kenyan'] best exemplifies the latter attitude. Yet for all the emotional outpouring occasioned by the government sticker, a number of important issues emerge that might illustrate well key considerations that this chapter will make with regard to the twin issues of youth culture(s) and identities.

First, it is significant that the launch of the 'patriotism' campaign was done not in a government office but on a Nairobi street. It is unusual for bureaucracies to make accommodative gestures to 'low' spaces but here we see a rare reversal of hierarchies whereby officialdom literally steps out to warmly embrace the street. That the site of engagement is a street enables us to think about the cosmopolitanism of the city and all the tensions that such a phenomenon—as an index of modernity—might generate. Secondly, the

choice of a bumper sticker as the medium of an official message might be taken to indicate recognition by mainstream culture of the power and agency of the mass media. Thirdly, 'patriotic' practices establish a crucial link between the idea of branding (the sticker's iconic value) and the concept of identity.

Overall, we see here the use of popular expressive forms which are crucial sites upon which meanings might be formulated. Contemporary Kenyan youth music needs to be seen in a similar light since "popular music...as a social-cultural phenomenon...embodies and expresses [...] new social identities which emerge as products of urbanization and modernization throughout the world" (Manuel, 1988: v).

Arguably, one of the most conspicuous developments to have happened in Kenyan popular music over the last fifteen years is the marked 'Americanization' of its forms; the rubric 'Kenyan hip hop' is now common place. While the claim that there is a marked Americanization of entertainment cultures globally is *passé*, it is also true to state that the rich discourse on local identities that this phenomenon fosters is hardly acknowledged. For instance, it is widely assumed that African American expressive culture—principally hip hop fashion and attitude—lends stylistic and rhetorical strategies to local youth music. However the corollary question "in what ways is hip hop *modified* to speak to its local practitioners?" has hardly been raised.

Indeed looking beneath the surface of Kenyan youth music reveals that the understanding upon which the foregoing assumption is founded is at best superficial, ignoring as it does the crucial aspects of agency and adaptation in cultural processes. Even as they remain quite versatile at making such appropriative gestures towards hip-hop, young people see, still, a clear demarcation between 'foreign' forms and "what is ours" ["*Ismarwa!*"]. Local rapper Delicious succinctly captures the issues in contention when he states:

I have changed the way I view my music. I'm trying to get my identity, first as a Kenyan, then as an international artist. Internationally [my influences are] 2-Pac Shakur, New Edition and Blackstreet (Nyanga 2006).

The argument in this chapter is that youth rappers appropriate the surface representations of African American popular culture not to speak to American themes *per se* but more crucially to explore local social-cultural space. Differently put, youth culture trains its gaze outwards from the local to the global in order for them to look back into the local. Their practices evince

a particular concern with anxieties of an identity especially in conflict with, firstly, the broader narrative of *the* 'Kenyan identity' and beyond this, secondly, to contending notions of modernity as we see, for instance, in the invocation of *black* rather than *white* super stars. Subversion and the reversal of hierarchies of meaning are critical tactics in this identity drama.

By focusing on the contemporary practices of popular rappers, I examine the processes of appropriation and contestation at work in Kenyan youth music and interrogate young people's understanding of the dynamics of cultural and self-identity. To appreciate current identity politics amongst Kenyan youth it is necessary to examine the background that has shaped the discourse on identity in the country.

"We must preserve our culture!" Post-independence Anxieties

In Kenyan history, discussions of identity have taken place along a number 'traditional' axes. They are deemed traditional in the sense that mainstream society considers them to be *the* accepted institutions through which questions of culture ought to be settled and prescriptions on identity formulated in a manner similar to Bourdieu's (1974) 'tastes'. What strands of identity have Kenyans have had to contend with over time?

Arguably, political definitions as to what constitutes a Kenyan identity have been predominant. One way in which the political class has attempted to set the standards especially immediately after independence is through the creation of the one party state. The emphasis was on unity and 'Africanness' whereby the latter was, often, narrowly conceptualized to mean 'black' as seen in the 'Africanisation' programs that led to blacks replacing whites in businesses and managerial positions. Furthermore, registering as a member of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) became the ultimate mark of patriotism; expressing views outside of the party structure automatically earned one the label of an 'enemy of the state' as evinced by the suppression of 'dissidents' under the reigns of both Jomo Kenyatta (1964-1978) and Daniel Arap Moi (1978-2002). As Haugerud (1995) has observed, there were many Kenyans who did not feel patriotic along the terms set out by the KANU elite. In other words, the identity prescribed by the single party state was too constrictive, even ideologically. Ultimately, it was not possible for everyone to feel Kenyan in the same way and the eventual agitation for

political pluralism seen more markedly in the 1990s might thus be read as a clamour for an alternative paradigm of a 'political' identity.

At a different level, 'unorthodox' churches and sects have attempted to create substitute ideas of identity. Principally here might be mentioned the Independent Churches, especially in Central Kenya, during the period of colonialism. Where a sect like Elijah Masinde's *Dini ya Msambwa* (Witter 1971) centered on creating a sense of identity around an African (Luhya) 'gospel' to compete with the official Christian religion of the colonizer, the independent churches in Central Kenya sought to harness modernity's values to traditional Gikuyu cultural practices. This blending strategy is seen for instance in the insistence by the Gikuyu then on the practice of female 'circumcision' while at the same time pursuing western education, albeit at independent schools.³ However, one again notices that the accent in the conception and practice of identity amongst these religious groups tends to lean heavily towards nationalist essentialisms. At other times, however, religious personality cults such as John Juma Pesa's in Western Kenya have developed by taking on alien identities; he is a self-proclaimed 'Pope'. Ultimately, these types of establishments do not offer a clear cut sense of identity, especially for Kenyan youth.

At a third level, the academy has attempted to offer a space within which debates on identity and culture might take place. Most notable here is the period of cultural nationalism witnessed at the University of Nairobi in the 1960s. Arguably, the best exemplification of this moment was the call to abolish the English Department at the university and instead replace it with an Afro-centric department of literature.⁴ Okot p'Bitek, Owuor Anyumba, Taban Lo Liyong as well as Ngugi wa Thiong'o played a key role in this debate. However, while not downplaying the need to pay attention to African forms of creativity, it must be acknowledged that the direction suggested by these scholars, if not pursued judiciously, runs the very real danger of instituting a nativistic project. This might be seen for instance in Wa Thiong'o's arguments in *Decolonising the Mind* about writing in mother tongue. Such an idea, rightly or wrongly, seems to entail a fixed idea of identity; culture and language's inbuilt appropriative capacity negate the notion of unchanging entities—whether these are to be understood either as complete cultural systems or as elements within them such as language, music and dress forms which are central signifiers in contemporary youth culture.

Thus faced with the idea of a traditional identity resulting from the three key authorities—state, church and academy—outlined above, it becomes clear that young people in Kenya find themselves having to confront a mainstream society whose self-concept does not really entertain the notion of plural identities.

Old School or New *Skool*?: The Politics of Expression

One of the significant differences between ‘old’ and ‘new’ popular music seems to lie at the rhetorical level especially in its invocation or otherwise of ethnic categories. In fact the strategy of using music to act as a vehicle for public debate and mobilisation is not new. This might be seen for instance in David Kamaaru’s *Nyimbo Cia Mau Mau* [Mau Mau Songs] through which an appeal is made for Gikuyu communal unity in the face of colonial assault at the same time as the oppressed are called upon to take up arms in defence of their land and freedom. Underpinning these calls is the assumption that people would heed these injunctions simply on account of their membership in an ethnic group. Indeed, in one of the songs the speaker states proudly; “If someone asked me, I’d raise my hands and declare ‘I am Gikuyu’”. The link between one’s occupancy of a particular social space and their identity is very clear in the artist’s mind.

A similar theme is observable generally in the music of the pioneer generation of Kenyan singers such as Daudi Kabaka and David Amunga. The former, known mainly for his appropriation of Chubby Checker’s *twist* style, was preoccupied in his music with the ways of rural folk-turned-towns’ people. In this regard, a key character that features in Kabaka’s music is the Luhya ‘greenhorn’, *pace* Raban (1974). Usually a naïve young man, he would be puzzled and dazzled by the ways of urban dwellers; he could only find redemption if he behaved according to the ‘good’ values of the Abaluhya. Eventually, he would have to go back ‘home’ to the village, marry a country girl and settle down to raise a family according to traditionally accepted values.

In Kabaka’s work the ‘contaminating’ city, as the antithesis of the village, represents a discontinuity with the old order and implies a severance of individuals from their roots and thus ‘true’ identity. In similar vein, Amunga’s ‘*America to Africa*’ track evokes the same idea of a return from America to Kenya as a necessary reconnection with the persona’s “people” and roots and contains the exhortation: “Dear countrymen, East or West, home will always

be home". This 'return home' theme is amplified by succeeding generations of musicians; CDM Kiratu's '*Kaba Kuinuka*' [I'd rather go home] and Kakai Kilonzo's '*Wakumbuke Wazazi*' [Remember your parents] may be cited.

Where escape from the city back to the village has been understood by older musicians as a viable social survival option, contemporary youth take the opposite view; the city is home and the rural village is not even contemplated. This understanding might be seen as being rooted in two sociological facts. First, where some of the older people might still have connections to their rural villages, many of Nairobi's youth were born in the city. To them, the countryside is an alien space. Secondly, these young people have grown up in a cosmopolitan environment; it is more practical and easier for them to deal with cultural plurality just as it is unviable for them to think of life according to models of singularity. To many of these youth, the ethnic diversity of the city has brought forth an alternative mode of social survival. Against this awareness Nairobi's new *Skool* musicians celebrate for instance Dandora—in the City's Eastlands—as Hip Hop City, Nairobi West estate as a 'beer garden' (*Krupt's Tukawake*) and rappers as 'street philosophers'.

Quite clearly, the scheme of values has shifted radically from the days of Kabaka's greenhorns; youth rappers now find meaning and validation by treading outside society's accepted norms. Thus understood, hip hop, especially in its more transgressive modes (dress, register and attitude), becomes the preferred rhetorical style of youth culture just as a perceptible strand of traditional conservatism is favoured by the older generation of singers. At this level, the differences in the styles of these two groups might be understood if we consider that the older singers (Kamaaru and his contemporaries) are closer to mainstream society in terms of values while the younger musicians (*Ukoo Flani Mau Mau*, *Nonini*, *Necessary Noize* etc.) are part of a broader marginalized social category i.e. an urban subcultural group that is neither necessarily poor nor prosperous. In any case the anxieties of the youth—rampant joblessness, the inability to raise families and a general lack of tangible social progress—are hardly understood by the older people. The youth have discovered that encoding their politics in a mode that transgresses mainstream tastes forces society to pay attention to their dilemmas.

It can also be argued that unwittingly or otherwise mainstream society has handed Kenyan youth the weapons with which to contest and upset the authority of mainstream culture; as to whether this possibility has been

considered is a different question. Nevertheless youth culture in Nairobi enables us to grapple with the issue of whether or not popular music might be considered to be “a creation of corporate (or state) culture industries that exploit, manipulate, or even create taste rather than respond to it” (Manuel 1988:8). On the one hand, it is true that without the infrastructure of popular culture such as FM radio and privately owned TV stations youth culture would not have had effective fora of expression. Indeed, none of the numerous FM radio stations, which have a wider reach than TV, is owned by a youth. On the other hand however, it is clear that these media supply the youth with material, as Faber (2004:350) has argued, that is subsequently creatively rearranged in popular cultural practices and adapted to the local situation. In this way, the resulting hybrid cultural practices become the expressive space with which the youth address and perform the tensions between the mainstream’s traditional worldview and their own sense of dissatisfaction with it. At this point the question that we need to grapple with is what ideas these ‘new’ forms and practices in youth culture encode about the world.

Modernist guises: Re-inventing the Past

The performance of youth culture mainly trades in its self-representation as the epitome of trendiness. As Charles Muia, an artist who decorates Matatu pointed out, “if you want to do any business with the youth, you must know and appeal to their sense of being modern.”⁵ According to this logic, the more thoroughly the youth present themselves as modern, the larger the gap they create between themselves and mainstream Kenyan society which they perceive to be steeped in conservatism. This is seen for instance in their sharply Western fashion sense; the consumption of modernity’s goods, in itself a culture (Bocock 1995), becomes their strategy for the construction of a youth identity.

However, in a number of significant instances we notice nostalgic gazes and attempts to resuscitate the past in the practices of contemporary youth music and popular culture. This can be seen in performers’ names. While the majority of practitioners go for hip-sounding, black culture tradition names such as *Kleptomaniacs*, *Necessary Noize*, *E-Sir*, *NIX*, *STL*, *Nameless*, *Chiwawa*, *JIMW@T*, *Poqpine* and *Boomba Clan* amongst others, a significant number of young performers use names that either have a distinct local flavor or that refer to well known Kenyan happenings. In addition, décor is deployed to

enhance the identities that particular musicians might choose to portray. Here we have a rap group like *Ukoo Flani Mau Mau* whose name calls to mind Kenya's 1950s independence struggle. Group members wear 'Mau Mau University' label T-Shirts to indicate their apprehension of the street as a site of legitimate knowledge. In turn, this awareness is rooted in the experience of struggle in Dandora's slum life.⁶ Indeed group members' talk is rich with ideas of mental as well as political revolution; the walls of Mau Mau Camp are decorated with an array of icons—Haile Selassie, Malcom X and Bob Marley on the one hand and rappers 2Pac Shakur and Notorious BIG on the other—each of whom, bar the latter two rappers, seems to represent an ideological contradiction, if interpreted alongside the rest. But then this makes a statement about the workings of urban youth culture; they appropriate, based on a 'correct' or 'incorrect' reading, what works for them; contradictions are not resolved they are ignored.

Another reference to local "*ghetto*" culture is seen in the name K-South which is fashioned out of Kariobangi South, one of Nairobi's squalid neighborhoods. For these groups slum life is spoken of with pride not only as a uniquely enlightening experience but it is also seen as presenting an alternative modernity. Their music often raises the subject of class warfare. On the one hand the Kiswahili-Japanese compound rap name *Risasi* [Bullet] *na Suzuki* points to the phenomenon of violence not just as a mode of crime but also as a negative social ethic. This latter meaning comes out clearly especially in Mashifta's 2002 track '*Majambazi*' in which they observe that "*Hii system ni ya majambazi*" [This social system is based on robbery]; '*shifita*' is the local reference to bandits in Kenya's North Eastern province. On the other hand the allusion to the Japanese car model might be read as an indicator of these youth's aspirations to material prosperity.

On their part, *Nyamuga Cultural Troupe* specializes in Gikuyu folksongs and the group is chiefly known for reworking other singers' music; they have rendered most of Joseph Kamaaru and H.M Maina's works in different tunes. To accent their identity, the performers put on distinctly Gikuyu attire; they are treading the path of Gikuyu culture as is suggested by the name *nyamuga*, which means sandals. The idea of following in one's cultural footsteps is also seen in the playfully reflexive stage name Shoe Kiratu Jnr; '*kiratu*' is Gikuyu for shoe.

In a related sense there exists in Nairobi a large group of popular culture practitioners who consciously strive to recuperate especially their childhood. These are mainly to be found amongst *Mugithi* artistes. Usually solo male performers, they operate by playing the guitar to the tune of an already recorded song and infusing into it their own lyrics in a process of creative corruption (Wa Mungai 2004).⁷ Incidentally the majority of these performers are Gikuyu, perhaps on account of the fact that there has been a more dominant Gikuyu-driven recording infrastructure in River Road which might historically be considered as being the city's music nerve center.

It is noteworthy that Gikuyu nursery rhymes and often-forgotten children's play songs are popular amongst *Mugithi* patrons, not all of whom necessarily understand the language in which these compositions are rendered. To this end, these performances have been argued as being constituted by a cosmopolitan heterophony meaning that the genre moves from being a Gikuyu dance to a national project (Wa Mutonya, 2005). Three such popular rhymes are '*Muceere ni mweka niuriagwo na giciko*', '*Wa tata wa tiriri*' and '*Ndathiire huti huuru*' to which patrons dance enthusiastically. In my view, in a situation of extreme social and economic anxieties spawned by modern urban existence, this moment is not merely one of carefree relief but it is, more crucially, an active reliving of childhood—wherever that might have been. After all people's childhood memories can be recalled regardless of one's particular ethnicity. Thus memory is wrapped in performance, and the dancing becomes an enactment of a 'happy' past. For most of the older people in Nairobi who patronize *Mugithi* sessions, that past often happens to be a rural one whose idyllic goodness is being suggested.

Another element through which we see attempts at reusing the past to speak to the present involves the fusion of traditional and modern genres and dance forms. *Ohangla*, chiefly identified with Charles Ademson (*Makadem*), and which was initially performed in Western Kenya but whose popularity has quickly spread to other urban centers, is one such dance. Done in Afro-fusion style this initially-Luo dance is especially appealing to the youth because of its aggressive, sexually suggestive style that readily evokes American rap's body poses. I am suggesting that once *Ohangla* is appropriated within the urban youth discourse of the body, the dance becomes a forum for the exploration of anxieties about sexuality, one of the key elements within which identity is understood.

At the stylistic level, there have been attempts to fuse different musical genres. This might be seen, for instance, in the track *Adhiambo C* that blends Benga with rap. A collaboration, in itself a metaphor of coexistence, between Deux Vultures and Dola Kabarry, the song is a syncretic performance of two distinct traditions, i.e. a youth culture's expressive style on the one hand, built upon Benga which, on the other hand, is hugely popular among older, more conservative Kenyans. This symbiotic relationship is arguably Kenyan youth's acknowledgement that their identity grows from and is rooted in the past. Indeed it is noteworthy that the song valorizes the full-bodied African woman, a perennial subject in Kenyan music. This testifies to male self-definition through the construction of the other i.e. femininity's desired attributes. Differently stated, urban youth music might at times evince an overt misogyny but in this context male identity cannot be conceived independent of the female body.

The above point is well demonstrated in *Softonia's* fascinating Gikuyu/Sheng rap, *Chocolate*. It narrates a 'crash' during which a rich man's daughter rams into the persona's car from behind. The ensuing negotiations about compensation lead, unexpectedly, to a romance between the speaker and the lady-figured as a chocolate bar—thereby raising the possibility that the 'accident' is a planned encounter on the latter's part. However, the most significant thing about the song is its use of Bangra which is apparently adopted from Punjabi Cinema. This poses a critical question: where do we place Indians in the wider Kenyan debate about identity? Cultures, even when they 'crash' into each other can always be fruitfully tapped into. Urban youth, for instance, love *Bhajia*, an Indian snack considered to be a marker of class but they hardly appropriate any cultural expression from India.⁸ Also, rather than mainly looking towards Hollywood, Kenyan film could explore to see what engagements might obtain from Indian cinema. Thus *Softonia* has redirected people's attention to India, a space that is often overlooked in Kenyan debates on global culture. This 'rediscovery' of India in Kenya might be seen as a countering of the dominance of Western expressive practices in youth culture.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to address itself to issues of self-definition among Kenya's urban youth. By examining contemporary youth pop music practices

alongside those of older generation singers, we have sought to demonstrate that young people are continually contesting predominant concepts of identity while simultaneously repackaging some traditional ideas into 'new' performative modalities. Local experience, not Western/American values, forms the real ground upon which contestation takes place; a Western pose is merely a consumer culture-driven tactical guise.

The youth have over recent years become increasingly aware of the potent agency of their subculture in Kenyan public affairs. The opposition's use of *GidiGidi MajiMaji's* immensely successful '*Unbwogable*' in the 2002 general elections forcefully brought this point home (see Nyairo and Ogude, 2005). In early 2006, the Government Spokesman launched a nation-wide competition for singers to compose patriotic songs. Again the youth featured centrally in that contest. Similarly, in July 2006 The Institute for Education and Democracy, through the *Red Korna* comedy performers was involved in the *Vijana Tugutuke* [Youth awareness] campaign to get young people to register as voters. These three instances indicate that society, more than ever before, is paying keener attention to youth culture, especially its statements and modalities of performance in music. Whether this is going to result in formally recognized participation of the youth in public life is a different question altogether. What is clear though is that mainstream Kenyan society can no longer ignore or wish away young people's positions and claims in public discourses on identity, taste and belonging. A recent proposal by the Kenya Publisher's Association on publishing in Sheng (Ngare 2006) quite correctly gestures to this kind of engagement.

Notes

- 1 The title of an album by Kenyan hip-hop duo *GidiGidi MajiMaji*.
- 2 While officially launching the bumper sticker in August 2006, the Kenya Government spokesman said that it was intended to serve as a strategy for rousing Kenyans' patriotism. It has been suggested that other useful spaces for the patriotism sticker might include doors to residences and offices as well as T-shirts (see Gakuo, 2006)
- 3 See Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* for a fictional representation of conflicts over female 'circumcision' between Gikuyu traditionalists who, incidentally, are all agreed on the need for formal schooling.
- 4 See Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Homecoming* (1974).
- 5 Author's interview notes, July 2002, Nairobi.
- 6 Author's interview notes, Mau Mau Camp Dandora, June 2005, Nairobi.

- 7 See also Mutonya (2005) in an analysis of Mugithi, popular stereotypes and ethnic identity.
- 8 Comic rapper Ndarlin' P's 'Gaceeri' track (1999) has a young man wooing a young girl with the promise of buying her a *bhaja*. Indians have been in Kenya since 1895, but there is remarkably little cultural contact between them and other Kenyans. The anxieties attendant to this phenomenon are aptly captured in a romance "Kama Sura" between a Luo bakery worker and his Indian employer's daughter featured in *Kwani?* 01.

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PART TWO

Youth

CHAPTER FOUR

Kenyan Youth and the Entropic Destruction of a Hopeful Social Order

Bantu Mwaura

There is a fascinating phenomenon manifest in the reaction one gets from a lot of friends and relatives alike upon coming back to the home country if one has spent a couple of years in the West. On the one hand, it is the excitement of welcoming a returnee, but on the other, it is the disillusionment of that return and particularly if that return is not merely a short visit back home. The excitement is borne of a connection with one who has ‘been to’ – whatever that connection portends, though clearly that connection is one that captures a hope for some future – and the disillusionment is borne from the fact that the return only helps in severing that hopeful future. The sharing of that hope for the future with one who has ‘been to’ does not necessarily mean that there is anything to be gained directly from such a person, no. It is a show of solidarity with one who has been lucky enough to escape the hopelessness of a futureless local condition.

Since coming back from the United States of America – where I had gone for further studies – I have met a couple of old friends, colleagues and relatives, and all of them invariably end up asking the one question that has become for me the ultimate question, the one defining question, the one question that captures the essence of the embedded attitude of envy for those who have managed to port in their passes the much revered United States or United Kingdom visas. It is the one question that clearly betrays personal aspirations, which is the desire to escape the hopelessness of the local condition by migrating to some Western country. The question in its manifest variations is thus directly phrased; “When are you going back?” or more ambiguously; “Have you come back to stay or are you on a short visit?” The answer “I am not going back” – as in I have finished whatever I had gone to do and now I am back home – in response to the more direct question elicits the curtly retort; “Why not... go back?” whereas the answer “I have come back to stay”

in response to what I consider the ambiguous variation of the same question extracts a frustrated; “To do what?”

These frustrations must be understood as being emblematic of a postcolonial condition clearly enunciated by Paulo Freire’s theory of “antidialogical action,” in which he identifies various fundamental characteristics, one of which is cultural invasion. In expounding the premise of cultural invasion, Freire cautions that invasion is a form of cultural and economic domination and that all domination involves invasion be it physical and overt or camouflaged and covert. He postulates that in cultural invasion the invaded “come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders rather than their own...” and further that “those invaded are alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from themselves” (Freire, 2000: 152-153).

It is this domination by the west, overtly manifest in the colonial state and covertly evident in the postcolonial reality that alienates the indigenous postcolonial subject from seeking home grown solutions to the innumerable economic and political woes that bedevil the postcolonial nation-state. They opt instead for quick fix approaches to personal – as opposed to collective – economic difficulties to wit, the acquisition by any means of most Western countries’ visas, in the belief that these are truly lands of effortless opportunities.

This condition of a helplessness whose salvation seemingly lies in migrating to the west is not dissimilar to what Franz Fanon has described in chapter four of his *Black Skin White Masks* under the title “The So-called Dependency Complex of the Colonised Peoples.” Though in the colonial scenario – the paradigm of Fanon’s thinking – the description of the dependency complex is pegged on the condition of race, hence the conclusion “[T]he feeling of inferiority of the colonised is the correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority” (Fanon, 1967:93), it is doubtlessly the basis that defines the postcolonial condition of the economic and political helplessness for which the resolution is seen to lie squarely in seeking refuge in western countries. In other words Fanon’s phrase can be refashioned thus; “the feeling of helplessness of the post colonial state is the correlative to the West’s feeling of hopefulness.”

In wondering what I have come back to Kenya to do, such people express – despite themselves – an innocently sentimental helplessness so dire that they no longer see or harbour any bit of hope for the future, as long as that

future is imagined within the local situation. It is a vulnerability shared by a large number of the Kenyan youth today. Clearly, it is this vulnerability then that informs the frustration embedded in the surprise that I would consider coming back from the United States to re-settle in Kenya. Why not grab the seemingly obvious opportunity of being in the U.S to make the so called economic leap from *mukuru wa thina* – the ominous valley of poverty.

Yet the concern is not without merit. The systematic destruction of the Kenyan economy over decades has well manifested itself in the reality of unemployment, diminished opportunities and inimitable corruption. These together with a political dispensation that doesn't seem to improve the local condition, even after such a triumphant regime change as the one that took place in the 2002 elections in Kenya, has roundly decimated the logic that the search for higher education standards results in the realisation of a more comfortable life based on the ability to scale the social status ladder. The end result is widespread disillusionment, disappointment and deep seated distrust of local initiatives. And this disillusionment and disappointment is especially evident amongst the younger post independence generation in present day Kenya.

The infatuation with the West and its representation as the magical land of opportunity is therefore categorically borne of two interlinked phenomena. One is the postcolonial legacy, itself an extension of the colonial history exemplified in Paulo Freire's theory of antidiologic action that continues to manifest itself even more powerfully in the postcolonial era. Only that the cultural invasion by the West, though exponentially overtly perfected by the colonial imperialists, is in the postcolonial reality covertly ossified by indigenous agents – themselves former colonised subjects – who now occupy positions of power, and largely continue to be at the mercy of the same imperial powers that though now physically absent still ensure their dominance. In the course of consolidating their political power, these local agents, ultimately acting for and on behalf of the imperial powers – either by design or by default – and in total disregard of the aspirations of the local communities, have adjudicated over the systematic devastation of local economies, the emasculation of cultural self actualisation and the decimation of the social well being of the populations they lord it over.

In this respect, the emergent conditions are directly responsible for the second phenomenon, the Fanonian condition of the dependency complex manifest in the disenchantment with anything local and in its stead the

idealisation of anything western. Hence the retort; “Why not... go back to the U.S?” and the frustrated “come back to Kenya... to do what?”

Freire’s antidialogic action achieves an even more confounding complex since the covert intricacies of domination by the invading culture is actually aided by and even practiced more damagingly by the dominated culture, a phenomenon that can only be rationalised as a manifestation of internalised oppression. This phenomenological condition of internalised oppression and the resultant order of a dependency complex generate a systematic obliteration of the future, since the construction of that future is squarely dependent on the invading culture. So the ‘why not?’ and the “to do what?” becomes an expression of a state of futurelessness.

In other words, my interlocutors exist in a condition where they cannot fathom a future in the circumstances they find themselves in, a reality expressed by their generous albeit miscalculated show of sympathy towards returnees, and articulated without saying it thus: “Why come back to this godforsaken country when you have the perfect opportunity to ensure a wonderful future in some western country?” And “come back to Kenya to do what and there is no future for anybody here?” This show of sympathy while genuine is a naive expression of a desire inimically crafted by a condition of internalised oppression that sees no other options for an alternative future save for the embodiment of western systems, styles and even physical spaces.

This postcolonial condition of a futureless present and its resultant condition of internalised oppression is largely constructed by a colonial past and sustained by a postcoloniality that has to a large extent failed to re-member the past. (Re-member has been used here in its evident duality; *remember* as to recall and *re-member* as to reorder or to rebuild). Paul Connerton in his *How Societies Remember* presents the argument that “our experiences of the present largely depend upon our knowledge of the past, and that our images of the past commonly serve to legitimate a present social order” (Connerton, 1989: 3). He further elaborates that these images of the past and the recollected knowledge of that past is what is used to construct a present, and additionally concludes that this construction of the present is conveyed and sustained by performance.

It is possible and logical to stretch Connerton’s thinking a little further and argue that in the same way that the images and recollected knowledge of the past convey and sustain a present social order, so does the recollected – and

yes re-membered – knowledge of the past in combination to the construction of the present social order, convey, sustain and ensure a future social order. In other words, if societies remember through recollecting the knowledge and images of their past to construct the social order of their present, the same token societies ensure continuity through recollecting their knowledge and images of their past *and their present* to construct their future.

Social memory, argues Connerton, (1989) is captured in commemorative ceremonies and that such ceremonies are only commemorative so long as they are performative. In this respect Connerton's sense of performance is not unlike that of Erving Goffman when in *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* Goffman uses the term "performance" in relation "to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (Goffman, 1959:22). Goffman uses the metaphor of the theatrical performance as a framework to explore the realm of human behaviour in social situations and just like an actor presents a character to an audience so do people in everyday life employ certain techniques to sustain everyday performances. Connerton thus concludes, "performativity cannot be thought without a concept of habit" (Connerton 1989: 5).

It is through this "habit" of valorising the West, itself an extension of the colonial project that has continued to ensure a "presentation of the self in everyday life" in the image of the West. This performance manifest in the continued valorisation of the West emanates from the colonial condition of the Fanonian dependency complex captured by the infatuation with the West as the magical land of opportunity. It continues to permeate the postcolonial reality through the practice of the Freireian antidialogic action. And this action has largely been well orchestrated – again, by design or default – by the two most responsible sectors largely concerned with the construction of a social imaginary; politics and the media.

The West has continued to be culturally glorified and economically valorised through two very important avenues: One, through the failure by the political class to *re-member* the past in the construction of a sustainable present and therefore future, and two, by the media that has, for whatever reason, been unable to disentangle itself from continued broadcast of the images that paint the West as the only foundation of a sustainable modern future. Such unassuming avenues as television programming have played a

crucial role in devaluing local culture and worse still, in entrenching the belief that western performativity – socially, economically and even politically – is the modern panacea upon which the future lies.

For the Kenyan youth, the image of the past that they have and continue to be bombarded with is that in which localised systems – cultural, economic and political – continue to be seen as playing second fiddle to the “mighty” West’s “civilised modernity.” The knowledge of the past for the youth remains one in which the white man – and in the postcolonial era the West generally, for indeed even the Africans in the diaspora are seen as being part of this West – is superior, his ways civilised and his being as the source of all salvation.

The commemorative political ceremonies that continue to be celebrated long after independence are those that subtly further entrench this same attitude of a superior West. In other words, in our everyday political reality, we continue to perform ourselves within colonial frameworks that place Western practices on a pedestal. Examples abound: The ceremonial opening of parliament led by a speaker in full regalia of a winter wig and gown, and even worse the “official” dressing code enforced in present day parliament in Kenya, where anything remotely African and outside of a tie and jacket is seen as being out of order, enough to expel a member of parliament from attending to national legislative matters; the presentation of the national budget in parliament complete with costumes and décor, to wit, a Minister of Finance in a western suit complete with a carnation, and the contents of the budget in a very specified briefcase type; the regalia adorned by both the judges and advocates of the high court complete with winter wigs. Given these few examples, is it a wonder that majority of Kenyans saw the recent efforts to design a national dress – a project jointly carried out by the government and the private sector in 2005 but which did not win popularity amongst the citizenry – in Kenya as inimical at best and a national joke at its worst?

Similarly, on the cultural front, television programming has ensured that the viewing public in Kenya is hooked on western soap operas, MTV music videos and news packages through beaming western channels for a good bit of the available airtime on local television channels. Even the news broadcast by such channels as CNN, BBC, DW TV has little to do with local content unless there is major disaster that captures the world’s – read West’s – media appetite for calamity-stricken Africa. In this respect the media in Kenya has remained unashamedly adamant in refusing to change this scenario. The hue

and cry raised unanimously in 2003 by broadcasting stations against the call by the Minister for Information and Broadcasting to ensure local programming is *raised to a meagre twenty percent*, is evidence of a media driven by pure profit, and by extension one that contributes to the emasculation of a cultural self-actualisation.

In short the presentation of the Kenyan youth in everyday life in Nairobi is defined by the presentation of the western youth in everyday life in western capitals. This performance of the self in the image of the West does not only define the social behaviour of the present day youth in Kenya but also further re-defines future and in this case that future in no uncertain terms lies physically and metaphorically in the west. In short the Kenyan youth live in circumstances that do not define a self respecting local future - the future is absent. Like radar-less vessels, the youth live a futureless present.

This futurelessness is what Femi Osofisan in his article "Theatre and the Rites of 'Post-Negritude' Remembering" (1999) laments when in reference to the "Western worlds control and manipulation of the technology of communication" he states that the advancement of satellite and the Internet together with the coming of CNN right into our bedrooms has brought such "cargo" as the Spice Girls, the funeral of Princess Diana, European sports and comedy channels etcetera. With this "constant exposure to the allure of the foreign," he grieves further "we have come to lose interest in, and respect for, our own environment, our products, our own institutions, our own languages and songs, our own peoples." Indeed he sees this affliction being worse among the youth and teenagers about whom he states 'there is a growing pervasive cult of American pop culture, with all its negative aspects, the imitation of which is regarded as the mark of "civilisation," or of "youthful exuberance."' This statement squarely captures the reality in present day Kenya.

The Kenyan youth, is to a good extent represented by the youth in the urban centres, and so generally speaking the aspirations of the Kenyan youth are captured by the urban youth. And the one thing that is currently animating and influencing the behaviour of the urban youth in Kenya today is the hip-hop phenomenon. Even major businesses seem to have noticed that in order to sell their products they need to cut their commercials using hip-hop undertones. The ever-sensitive campaign against HIV and AIDS seems to be most effective on its targeted main audience – the youth – when it employs hip-hop vibes or is fronted by hip-hop artists. But while there is nothing essentially wrong

with the hip-hop phenomenon ensconcing the national psyche, it is evident that the Kenyan hip-hop generation is ensnared by what Osofisan describes as a “growing pervasive cult of American pop culture, *with all its negative aspect...*” A cursory examination of the hip-hop music riding the waves on the Kenyan music charts today clearly shows a cultural phenomenon that has perfected the art of regurgitating Black American perversion of gangsterism and sexism expressed in a good bit of the American hip-hop music. The only notable difference for the local hip-hop artistes who have bought into this perversion is the iniquitous translation of the same perversion into local languages.

David Mathenge – whose nom de plume is *Nameless*, is a good example if only because he has been riding the airwaves of popularity – defined himself as a popular hip-hop artist after releasing his album *On Fire* produced by Ogopa Deejays in 2004. The opening number in this debut album is titled *Mannerless*. In this song he extols the virtues of living a youthfully hedonistic life, in which the clarion call is to defiance of order, and commencement of chaos and disorder. It is the thematic framework that pervades all of the numbers in *Nameless*’s album *On Fire*. And just like most American hip-hop music videos have perfected the art of demeaning women by portraying them as sexual dance maniacs and even worse by referring to them in slang as “video whores”, so does Mathenge see women as nothing beyond buttock shaking pleasure giving *mannerless* dance partners. He sings in this opening number:

... it is time to shake your booty yo’
 Like yo’ in my video
 I’m losing my mind
 When you shake your behind
 We dance together
 We dance forever
 Coz’ I’m too young to bother
 ... Nameless, she’s so mannerless
 I like this mess
 And I encourage it nevertheless
 I want to see total disorder ...

This “booty shaking” business in Mathenge’s music – complete with the accompanying terminology – is borne of the hip-hop culture evangelised by African American hip-hop artistes of the gangster rap macho shame, in the same way that the disorder being preached is a direct influence of hip-hop music from American urban culture. And Mathenge is not alone. Such

songs that became hits like “*Manyake*,” sang by the duo of Joel and Circute, even when essentially talking about the necessity of using condoms do so by describing the womenfolk as flesh and specifically for the eating. Indeed the term “manyake” is the derogatory slang in Swahili for thick raw flesh. Listening to – and even watching the now popular hip-hop music video’s on local television – a cross section of hip-hop artistes in the ever-popular FM stations in Kenya today, one can easily see how it is that most of the leading examples of emerging young musicians have been consumed by what Osofisan refers to as “youthful exuberance.”

This “youthful exuberance” is symptomatic of a lack of a positive self-awareness and the presence of a diminishing self-evaluation of a population dominated by Western media. A scenario that Ngugi wa Thiong’o warns about in his 2003 Steve Biko Lecture given at the Cape Town University in South Africa under the title “Recovering Our Memory: South Africa in the Black Imagination.” He reminds us of that Heideggardian phrase that “A people without a consciousness of their being in the world, can easily be guided by another to wherever the guide wants to take him, even to his own extinction.”

Yet this “youthful exuberance” is not merely coincidental. It is a phenomenon that ought to be understood within the reality that the Kenyan youth is constantly fed a cultural diet that is as alienating as it is psychologically manipulative. Such television channels as Channel O and MTV are the readily available mentors for the budding Kenyan musician and no doubt this is where these budding musicians’ role models come from since there’s nothing with which to compare these Western monstrosities. It is a phenomenon that clarifies Freire’s idea of cultural invasion through the Western world’s “control and manipulation of the technology of communication,” abetted by a local broadcasting industry that is driven by the lust for a quick buck – through filling airtime with cheap out-of-date foreign programmes – and unashamedly rejecting a directive to raise local content to a meagre, and by any standard, shameful twenty percent.

Through this digital divide the West has sustained a cultural invasion that began with the scramble for Africa, followed by the institutionalisation of colonial dominance. In the postcolonial era the so-called “fathers” of the independent nations in Africa complicated this cultural invasion through their autocratic grasp on national politics, autocracies largely influenced and

made possible by a world polarised by the so-called cold war. Long after independence, populations that have been disillusioned by botched economies, bungled cultural environments and abortive political self-actualisation are sustaining this invasion today. While there have been efforts to consciously re-route the political and cultural direction towards a self-actualising future, it is evident that in Kenya today this ominous state of political, economic and cultural atrophy is being abetted by influential yet youthful personages.

In the run up to the 1992 election in Kenya – the first multiparty election in the post-independence period – the ruling party (Kenya African National Union-KANU) well calculated rigging machinery. This included establishing a party youth wing infamously christened Youth for KANU 92 (YK 92) based in Nairobi. It set out to sway the young vote, particularly in the capital city, that was being seen to be in the fore front of clamouring for political change. By the time of the election in December of the same year YK 92 had whipped up an enormous cream of cash – largely siphoned from the exchequer – to woo the youth. By the time the election was over, YK 92 had turned its loyal leadership, largely made up of university students and nondescript party youth wingers into overnight multi millionaires, influential political schemers and business magnates. Small wonder that KANU easily “won” the 1992 election in the process creating an incorrigible class of youthful politicians who would continue to entrench the ruin began by the founding fathers of the Kenyan post independence nation.

There is no doubt that it is the YK92 mentality that groomed and shaped the biggest political and economic outrage in Kenyan history; the Goldenberg scandal. The mastermind one Kamlesh Pattni – by then, the early 1990’s, was only in his mid 20’s – in collaboration with political bigwigs and with total impunity, siphoned funds from the central bank of Kenya running into billions of dollars, in the name of trading in gold. Kamlesh Pattni and his Goldenberg Company were the subjects of a commission of enquiry instituted by the National Alliance of Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government after it won the 2002 election. Since coming to power, the NARC government has itself not been without its own share of scandals. Anglo Leasing is the name of a company, whose operational details have remained scarce, suspected to be operating from the United Kingdom. In this scandal it is claimed that military procurement was being used as a façade to siphon government funds. It remains unresolved and continues to beleaguer the NARC government to date. Yet it must not be forgotten that the NARC government, itself a grand

coalition principally set up by seemingly reform minded relatively youthful politicians and political activists, rode to power mostly on the promise of offering rejuvenated political, economic and cultural programmes.

But the failure of the seemingly new political dispensation midwived by the NARC government was bound to suffer the fate it finds itself in today. It is a dispensation that is founded on a political reality historically entrenched on economic and political scheming singularly determined by self-aggrandising engagements. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the coalition was nothing beyond a club of self-seeking politicians opportunistically brought together by machinations driven by individual designs to grab much desired political power and quick economic gains. No wonder the much-touted pre-election memorandum of understanding that brought together politically strange bedfellows in a seemingly grand coalition could not hold, soon after election. And it is in the same way that the current constitutional impasse – in which political disagreements amongst cabinet members in the NARC government have largely stalled the process of writing a new constitution – remains the best illustration of this reality. Yet these cabinet members campaigned for political positions on the proviso that dispensing with the older generation would be the beginning of a new political reality engendering political egalitarianism and self-determinism.

The problem clearly is that a mere generational change will not necessarily establish an egalitarian polity. For as long as the obtaining institutional history is based on the oppression of the majority by a political class, itself a minority, no amount of youth can change the inherent institutional fraud if the institutions themselves do not undergo an overhaul. Mahmood Mamdani in an article presented at the *First Conference of Intellectuals from Africa and Diaspora* organised by the African Union in October 2004 titled “Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism” starts by positing that while Walter Rodney wrote *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, no one took time to examine how Europe ruled (Mamdani’s emphasis) Africa. He qualifies this introductory statement by concluding that:

“Democracy is not just about who governs and how they are chosen. More important, it is about how they govern, the institutions through which they govern, and the institutional identities by and through which they organize different categories of citizens. Colonialism was not just about the identity of governors, that they were white or European; it was even more so about the institutions they created to enable a minority to rule over a majority.”

On this token, we can therefore confidently conclude that in failing to remember the past the current crop of political leaders has failed to offer a much desired future for the country. We must similarly proceed by first dispelling the generalised cynical cliché that the youth are the future leaders. The leadership style, quality and principles largely embraced and exuded by influential youth in political leadership in today's Kenya offers no self-regarding future at all. It is a futureless present that has only succeeded in entrenching the institutional performance of the Kenyan self in the image of the West, where local initiatives are suspect and Western schemes are valorised. Hence, merely calling for a youthful leadership in total disregard of the factors that have created the present conditions of postcoloniality is engaging in an inescapable fatality manifest in the continued entropy of a self-determinant present and future.

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CHAPTER 5

Behind Bars: Ngugi, Women, and the Rite/ Right of Passage

Garnette Oluoch-Olunya

hell is woman... heaven is woman

Ngugi¹

Circumcision and Clitoridectomy were like forest clearance; they cut childish nature into adult culture

Lonsdale²

Introduction

This Chapter attempts a reading of Ngugi's treatment of Wanja of *Petals of Blood* (1977) within the gender dynamics of Gikuyu culture. It problematises his notable ambivalence towards his women- in-transition, as they negotiate status from well-established cultural spaces to the places of urban dislocation where they are prostitute at subversive best. An understanding of the traditional significances of female circumcision clarifies the conflict that runs as an undercurrent in Ngugi's *oeuvre*. Keenly aware of his intervention, Ngugi interrogates, but also reinforces the resilience of culture in an uncertain post-colonial present.

The Story

Petals of Blood is set in Ilmorog. Once small and dusty, desolate and all but forgotten, boasting not even a track fit for a cattle wagon (*PB*, 31), Ilmorog is plunged by the new Trans-Africa highway, and Wanja's entrepreneurial rediscovery of Thengeta, a once traditional brew, into the twentieth century. It is transformed into the New Ilmorog of horror and intrigue in which the present moment of the story is set. The Trans-Africa highway, which 'cut right through Ilmorog' brings division to Ilmorog even as it takes its youth and innocence. It transforms the village to a totally new way of life, one in which murder is 'irio or ugali', in which murder has become commonplace.

The novel, structured as a detective story, opens with the investigation of the deaths in a brothel fire of three influential members of society, Kimeria, Mzigo and Chui by Inspector Godfrey. The first two are educationists, while the third is an industrial mogul. Those suspected of committing the murders are in its opening sections arrested: Munira, the school teacher, Abdulla, a shopkeeper and ex-freedom fighter, and Karega, an untrained teacher turned trade unionist. Conversely, those crippled by the urban centres have found a refuge in Ilmorog.

Wanja, injured in the fire, is also under suspicion for the murder. She owns the brothel in which the three men are burnt to death. Responsible for bringing enterprise to the village, she also returns to live with her grandmother, fleeing the sordid and unbearable life of prostitution in the City. Ironically, she brings this life home to Ilmorog with her. Her life is ruined early by Kimeria, a married man who makes her pregnant while she is still at school but cannot marry her because he is a Christian. She awaits questioning at the hospital. The drama unfolds as the suspects recount to the police the events and histories leading up to the murders against a backdrop into which Ngugi interweaves historical and contemporary Kenya events – corruption and other politically motivated murders, for instance, that lend credibility to his story, locating this post-independence country.

The novel has Wanja at its centre. This becomes clear as the investigation progresses. The lives of the three victims, as those of the three male suspects are intimately and inextricably interlinked with her life. She is the key not only to the murder investigation, but to the unity of the stories of the other central characters in the text. An anti-heroine, Wanja is torn from the social and cultural moorings that validate her and is pitted against a shattered world struggling to reinvent itself. Ngugi interweaves history with fictional character, location and cultural event, always reassessing the social and cultural impact of this intervention. Circumcision, for instance, is by no means a national ritual³ and has been used to exclude more effectively than politics and religion. It is crucial that this bias is understood against the fact that the traditional Gikuyu male set the agenda for power in independent Kenya. With ethnic cleavage persisting as way forward, Ngugi's writing, even in Gikuyu, remains one of the most powerful challenges to those who hold power.

Ngugi's conceptualisation of Wanja is dominated by the issue of female circumcision, the concern of the earlier novel, *The River Between* (1965).

This novel is set in 1930s Kenya, the period during which the issue of female circumcision dominated the social and political agenda. The great determination of the Scottish missionaries to put an end to what they saw as a barbaric custom met with the equally great determination of the Gikuyu to protect the custom which gave them their *raison d'être*. Colonial might overcame Gikuyu debate, resulting in a period of general tension, as well as intense bitterness amongst the Gikuyu.

The River Between is about this clash of cultures. Set against a background of a people already divided,⁴ it climaxes with the death of Muthoni, who risks death rather than forsake what had defined her sex amongst her people. Muthoni, the daughter of the Christian and church leader, Joshua, rebels when her father will not allow her circumcision. Her argument is simple: both her parents are circumcised, yet Christians. The only way in which she can survive in her community is if she understands it, and not undergoing the rites of circumcision robs her of this right. As she explains it to her sister, Nyambura:

I – I want to be a woman. I want to be a real girl, a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges [...] I, too, have embraced the white man's faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe. Yes, the white man's God does not quite satisfy me. I want, I need something more. My life and your life are here in the hills, that you know'. (RB, 26)
[...] 'Yes – I want to be a woman made beautiful in the manner of the tribe...' (RB, 44)

Muthoni's rebellion ends in her death. The ritual that makes her a woman also kills her. To her, the physical mutilation is inconsequential when set against her assured status as respected marriageable woman. This status, branded physically and psychologically on her body, is fundamental. But as she dies, she also sees Jesus, reconciling the Christian and the tribal. In the novel, Waiyaki, educated but sensitive to the importance of tradition echoes Kenyatta as he reflects on the significance of Muthoni's action:

Circumcision of women was not important as a physical operation. It was what it did inside a person. It could not be stopped overnight. Patience, and above all, education, were needed. If the White man's religion made you abandon a custom and then did not give you something else of equal value, you became lost. An attempt at resolution of the conflict would only kill you, as it did Muthoni. (RB, 142)

Custom is nevertheless sacrificed to Christianity which, with its assurance of eternal life, triumphs. Chege, defender of the tribal ways in the novel queries the Christian intervention:

Were these Christians now preaching against all that which was good and beautiful in the tribe? Circumcision was the central rite in the Gikuyu way of life. Who had ever heard of a girl that was not circumcised? Who ever pays cows and goats for such a girl? (*RB*, 37-38)

This is how Waiyaki describes circumcision in the novel:

Circumcision was an important ritual to the tribe. It kept people together, bound the tribe. It was at the core of the social structure, and a something that gave meaning to a man's life. End the custom and the spiritual basis of the tribe's cohesion and integration would be no more. (*RB*, 68)

The renunciation of indigenous culture for the uncertain promises of Christianity, and indeed for the material rewards of western education were strongly contested. But if they could not win, the people were determined at least to be selective. They insisted that:

We're going to get that Western education, but within our own cultural soil [...] without having to accept the religion, without having to accept the colonial government.⁵

As a non-Christian, Waiyaki is not allowed to complete his education at Siriana but to the rousing cry of 'Gikuyu Karinga. Keep the tribe pure. *Tutikwenda Iriku*' (*RB*, 68)⁶ he starts a secular school. In Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938), an interviewee and spokesperson, Ng'ang'a Ngoro said of the choice between Christianity and tradition: 'I was a Christian. If the choice lay between God and circumcision, we choose (sic) circumcision. But it is a false European choice.'⁷ It may have been a false European choice, but it was the one that largely prevailed.

Ngugi demonstrates this tension using Munira's relationship with Julia. Munira marries a traditional woman to escape the cold austerity of his Christian upbringing but is disappointed. He has abandoned the lacklustre and hypocritical lifestyle of his family, but it is to this way of life that Julia is drawn. It is Munira who opts to leave, without Julia. Julia embraces his family's belief, transforming herself into a model Christian daughter-in-law: a good woman (*PB*, 91). In the process she is emptied of beauty and passion. This is how Munira describes her:

She could have been beautiful, but too much righteous living and Bible reading and daily prayers had drained her of all sensuality and what remained now was the cold incandescence of the spirit. (*PB*, 16)

To make matters worse, their lovemaking is framed by prayer: 'Munira could have forgiven her everything but those silent prayers before and after making love' (*PB*, 91). Munira finds this divine intrusion into marital intimacy unnecessary and absurd. This relationship is cast against the missionaries' argument that circumcision caused damaging and lasting psychological trauma on young girls. What Ngugi depicts is the psychological conditioning of Christianity evidently having an even more devastating and longer lasting effect on female sexuality than does circumcision. Julia is psychologically bound by a Christian dependency on divine grace and atonement. The sad fact is whichever way we look at it, women are doubly oppressed – by tribal culture, and by imperialism. Julia exemplifies woman bound by both.⁸

Munira's desire to find succour in relationships with women is then transferred to Wanja, whom he ultimately fails to possess. He subsequently blames her for shattering the protective world he has built around himself, for 'his later sliding into sloth and drinking' (*PB*, 332). For Munira, Wanja epitomises all that has gone wrong in his society. Ironically, her promiscuity, which he finds so abhorrent, is the result of a deep cultural split created by the very structures in which Munira seeks solace. Even though implicated as part of the exploiter class, she is herself largely a victim of a past that, beginning with Kimeria, leads her ultimately to a life of prostitution. In her plea to Karega, she says of her association with the rich men: 'I have tried to fight them, the only way I can' (*PB*, 327). Wanja fighting back is not heroic. Ngugi has her shuttling back and forth between not one or two but three bedrooms, and the kitchen, in a parody of the two places in which he has earlier situated women's oppression. But even worse, he has her revelling in this bizarre role: 'Cooking and the kitchen became the most important link in the drama and she was beginning to enjoy it' (*PB*, 329). It is Wanja herself who early in the novel says of the female attempt to go beyond domestic prison: 'It seemed that no matter how much effort we put in, our road led to the bedroom and the kitchen' (*PB*, 37).⁹

In this chapter I argue that circumcision, cause of the bitterest historical conflict between the Gikuyu and the colonialists, in crucial ways informs the context of *Petals of Blood* and underpins Ngugi's treatment of women. Although

considered radically pro-women even by feminists, Ngugi cannot surmount the historical betrayal of the female sex by an oppressive patriarchy that chose political compromise over female, and indeed ethnic, cultural identity.¹⁰ From New York University (NYU) Ngugi launched and edited the Journal, *Mutiiri*.¹¹ Interestingly, this was the name for those who supported the initiates during the circumcision ceremony, symbolically the upholders of culture.¹² Within the shaky Gikuyu nation within a (Kenya) nation, culture becomes the new battlefield for dominance as well as a site of repression.

If at the time of the writing of *The River Between* Ngugi seemed to represent the victory of Christianity over the tribal ways by Muthoni's death,¹³ his views had undergone considerable change by the time he wrote *Petals of Blood*. His ambivalence towards the 'new' woman is demonstrated in his equivocation over the status of women. It is evident in the metaphor he uses to anchor his female characters: even at their most radical, they are prostitutes. It is, of course, a metaphor resonant with and reflective of the urban context, in which Gikuyu men found themselves threatened by the changes that gave their women new freedoms and business opportunities, making them more difficult to control. Gikuyu infrastructure became even more largely dependent on female labour, a situation the men saw no reason to challenge since the women continued to command little status.

In *The River Between*, circumcision appears as an anticlimax rather than prelude to a sexually fulfilling life. John Lonsdale, who presents perhaps the most detailed research on this topic, sees no contradiction in his claim that: 'men's preoccupation with fertility made them want to control sexuality, not dominate women'.¹⁴ Lonsdale attempts to rationalise the ritual by metaphorically situating it within Gikuyu social culture. He says: 'Circumcision and clitoridectomy were like forest clearance; they cut childish nature into adult culture. Women felt the same'.¹⁵ By clinching his statement with women's compliance, he conscripts them into a collusion with culture while suggesting the highhandedness of external intervention in a matter consensually agreed to locally. And he is right. The perceived Western threat to Gikuyu social order, forged since *agu na agu* – as far back as tribal memory went – was strongly resisted by both sexes. Equally important in defining manhood and womanhood, women themselves fought to retain the practice, reading into the lack of support from the men failure and betrayal rather than collusion with Western forces in patriarchal oppression.¹⁶ Muthoni's desperate and heroic action in *The River Between* best demonstrates her inability

to conceptualise or comprehend the sudden and complete loss of identity signalled by this change. Livingstone, the missionary in *The River Between* retreats in horror and disgust at the 'instruction' and ritual dances (RB, 56). And yet it is a strictly controlled and cathartic purging, secured by taboo against the consummation of the desires unleashed (RB, 41-42).¹⁷ It is after this event that Muthoni asks: 'How can I possibly remain as I am now?' (RB, 43)

According to Kenyatta, who analysed the implications of circumcision from an anthropological, as well as cultural point of view, everything in Gikuyu life was bound up with this ritual. His claims in *Facing Mount Kenya*, often quoted as the authoritative voice on the place of female circumcision in Gikuyu tribal psychology and culture, apply equally to male circumcision. He says circumcision is not only the most important custom among the Gikuyu, it is the one upon which all else rests:

this operation is still regarded as the very essence of an institution which has enormous educational, social, moral and religious implications, quite from the operation itself. For the present [1930s] it is impossible for a member of the tribe to imagine an initiation without a clitoridectomy. Therefore the abolition of the surgical element in this custom means to the Gikuyu the abolition of the whole institution. [...] It is regarded as the *conditio sine qua non* of the whole teaching of tribal law, religion and morality. [...] It is important to note that the moral code of the tribe is bound up with this custom, and that it symbolises the unification of the whole tribal organisation.¹⁸

It was presumptuous to imagine an easy substitution of one set of values for another. At meetings held to address the issue, re-education rather than Government decree was soon proposed by both sides as the only way to overcome the psychological disjunction.¹⁹ The ramifications were many. Kenyatta says:

No proper Gikuyu would dream of marrying a girl who has not been circumcised, and vice versa. It is taboo for a Gikuyu man or woman to have sexual relations with someone who has not undergone this operation.²⁰

This taboo could only be lifted by undergoing ritual purification, '*kurutwo tahu*' or '*gutahikio migiro*', a literal vomiting of the evil deeds.²¹ This is the point at which Ngugi leaves Waiyaki and Nyambura in *The River Between* (RB, 151-2), with the prospect of a ritual purification, the nature of which is not disclosed, looming.

The reverberations from the social and cultural upheaval precipitated by the 1920s debate on female circumcision continue to be felt today.²² Patrick

Williams now argues that the sense of outrage displayed by the missionaries, discussed earlier, was exaggerated given that this practice was not exactly new to Westerners.²³ Williams is nevertheless suspicious of Kenyatta's attempts to minimise its seriousness by claiming it was just a clitoridectomy, a simple 'trimming'.²⁴ He also situates the practise within a broadened context. Williams says:

Although the practice was portrayed as the essence of primitive savagery and the patriarchal abuse of women's bodies, such an attitude required a degree of historical amnesia, as well as racism, since the more localised form of genital mutilation, clitoridectomy, had been practised in late Victorian England, and on a rather more widespread basis in the United States. The Gikuyu version involved cutting off the labia as well as the clitoris though Kenyatta insists that only clitoridectomy was involved, and that excision of the labia was an aberration, creating a mistaken impression among whites.²⁵

In her research on female madness in Victorian England, Elaine Showalter found that circumcision was practised even in its more severe form, that is, the removal of the labia. She reports the case of a surgeon, Dr Isaac Baker Brown who in the 1860s 'went beyond clitoridectomy to the removal of the labia.' Brown was subsequently expelled from the Obstetrical Society in 1867, curiously not for medical negligence,²⁶ but for engaging in what even at the time was regarded as patriarchal abuse of women's bodies. In failing to protect women he was charged with 'misuse of male authority'.²⁷ Showalter defines it within an ideological, gendered context:

Clitoridectomy is the surgical enforcement of an ideology that restricts female sexuality to reproduction. The removal of the clitoris eliminates the woman's sexual pleasure, and it is indeed this autonomous sexual pleasure that (is) defined as the symptom, perhaps the essence, of female insanity.²⁸

It is fascinating how a similar kind of 'madness' drove the issue in 1920s Kenya, though ironically, the church and Gikuyu men crucially failed to recognise that ultimately they both wanted the same thing: effective control of female sexuality.²⁹ The purposes of Christianity were ironically fulfilled by the ritual of tradition in grotesque symbiosis. Effective control of women was ensured and female sexuality checked, a function the puritanical church might have recognised with relief but for the accompanying orgiastic practices. And yet the Scottish missionaries believed passionately in the emancipation of women, a commitment demonstrated by their taking on political organisations (eg. the Kikuyu Central Association) and Government over this issue. Neither

tradition nor Government has succeeded in resolving it.³⁰

In 'Cultural Nationalism', Rosberg and Nottingham give us in brief an indication of the perceived immensity of the loss and hence insight into Muthoni's anguish. In Gikuyu culture:

only a circumcised girl could be considered fully a woman. It was widely believed that uncircumcised girls would not physically be able to bear children. Not to be circumcised was to be debarred from developing the personality and attributes of womanhood and to be condemned to remain psychologically a little girl (*kirigo*). In Kikuyu eyes an uncircumcised girl of marriagable age was an object of derision, indeed almost disgust. Far from being unnecessary, the operation symbolised the most important moment in a girl's life, and her bearing during the pain that accompanied it was a matter of great pride or shame to her family.³¹

A woman was nothing without circumcision. In many African societies, and especially amongst the Gikuyu, a barren woman is shunned.³² The idea that 'the sexuality of young girls was depraved and that female promiscuity caused sterility'³³ linked fertility to circumcision. Ironically, it was the very ritual that initiated them into the secret world of adult sexuality that also blunted their enjoyment of it. Interestingly, the medical establishment was pressured by the Gikuyu, and the Church into supervision of the male ritual, in itself a problematic privilege, as in Munira's case, where he 'had always felt a little incomplete because he had been circumcised in hospital under a pain killer, so that he never truly felt that he belonged to his agegroup... (PB, 204). The church nevertheless resisted any such involvement in the female equivalent, already a highly politicised and explosive issue.³⁴ The result of this is that women continue at the mercy of traditional practitioners or quacks, with often disastrous, if avoidable, consequences. This has led to an unhealthy secrecy over the practice even today. It goes some way to explaining the anxiety and ambivalence demonstrated by Ngugi in his characterisation of women.

Ngugi's post-independence context is, therefore, figured by a powerfully gendered cultural nationalism that stems from the crisis centred on female circumcision. Curiously, Ngugi's criticism has strong humanist, moralistic overtones in which the suspension of judgement is betrayed by his sharp contrast of woman in ideal states, as pure, or as whore. These opposites may be felt to derive from the Catholic tradition of Virgin and Magdalen.³⁵ He projects the female metaphor in which a capricious Kenya prostitutes herself, allowing trespass by settlers, retaining neo-colonial links, forging new alliances with the United States and succumbing to the dictates of its

powerbrokers, the international financial institutions, the IMF and the World Bank in order to keep afloat. Indeed, the transition to neocolonialism was sealed by the failure of Kenyatta's government to restructure the colonial system at independence. I want to suggest two things here. The first is that Gikuyu cultural cohesion was broken on the back of female circumcision. The second, that as a result of the prominence given women because of this focus, Ngugi uses the issue as a ready link to the much broader issue of cultural dispossession of the Agikuyu, and ultimately of Kenyans. Caught at the crossroads of imperialism and tradition the female is sacrificed at the altar of compromise at all levels – religious, political (to be in favour of female circumcision meant one belonged to the KCA), social (they were excluded from missionary education, hence the formation of independent and Karinga schools), cultural and economic. The result is that she loses all that defines her within her culture. It is the so-called 'liberation' or emancipation by modernity of the Gikuyu female from the cultural moorings of a traditional way of life underpinned by initiation rites of which circumcision was the climax that have led her to use what was once sacred as a cheap commodity in the newly defined post independence market. The distance between female sexuality as virtue, to vice, is short.

In *Petals of Blood* Wanja, corrupted as a schoolgirl by a hypocritical, godfearing neighbour turns into the Wanja of New Ilmorog, entrepreneur and madam. Her link to the seven male characters that dominate the novel is that she has slept with all of them.³⁶ The four murders that anchor the plot of the book are connected to her, as are the suspects, and she is herself a suspect. Ngugi assigns her a paradoxical role, at once powerful and disturbing. She is the product of a system that exploits her, and the only way she can strike back is with the tainted weapons of her exploitation. Williams sees the words of Ramatou, the exploited woman in Djibril Diop Mambety's film *Hyenes* as particularly appropriate to Wanja's situation here: 'Society made me a whore; now I'm going to make the whole world a brothel'.³⁷ In her youth she bears so much promise, she is equal to the boys. They call her Wanja 'Kahii', a diminutive term used to refer sometimes to girls contesting gender boundaries. She explains it:

It is what they used to call me at school. I often wrestled with the boys. I also did some drills done by boys. Freewheeling. Walking on my hands. Wheelbarrow. I would tuck in my skirt and hold it tight between my legs. I also climbed up trees. (PB, 25)

This is a back-handed compliment, and the seamless possibilities of youth are, of course, checked in adulthood. Lonsdale pins down that issue when he says: 'This debate on what it was to be a man or a woman defined, perhaps more than any other issue, what it was to be Kikuyu.'³⁸ Within this context, issue can be taken with Ngugi's equation of the valiant Wanja to a '*kahii*', an uncircumcised boy.³⁹ Wanja the woman becomes a prostitute, and in the Kenyan society of the 1970s, the female prostitute had no male equivalent. In repeatedly casting women at their most dynamic and revolutionary as whores, Ngugi establishes the neo-colonial context as one in which past shame frames present triumph. It is a profound shame, as priceless virtue submits to cheap, transient pleasure. Men are invested with a power over, and contempt for women as they use and violate them. Somehow, in view of this prevalence in Ngugi, it is difficult to agree with the argument common today that focus on good governance should supersede that of gender parity. Ngugi recognises that women are doubly oppressed, and still his writing carries rather than subverts the oppression by employing the one metaphor that is, within its context, both unforgiving and unforgivable.

Once violated and defiled, Wanja's redemption is secured ultimately by her murder of Kimeria. Wanja draws from a power within and refusing to be victim, strikes back at her oppressor: 'What she would never tell anyone now that she was still alive and the evidence had been burnt, was that it was she who had killed Kimeria ... struck him dead with the panga she had been holding (*PB*, 330). In the final analysis she does not leave her difficult task to Abdulla, as she had earlier planned: she seizes the moment and resolves the issue herself. Even her family demons are conscripted into her triumphant cleansing in a rebirth by fire. What at first looks like a tragic triumph for Christianity, Munira's purging of vice in one masterstroke is transformed into a much more complex interplay of the degeneration of Munira into holy insanity, juxtaposed with Wanja's fiery absolution. As Munira 'watched the whorehouse burn, the tongues of flame from the four corners forming petals of blood, making twilight of the dark sky' Wanja secures her freedom under cover of the same petals (*PB*, 333). It is a convergence at once compelling and dramatic, and contrary to Munira's understanding of his own role in the drama. This Jezebel, who subverts all that Munira's disturbed mind holds sacred, has, he believes, to die a sacrificial death. She lives. He is consigned to a delusional state, teetering on the edge of insanity.

Notes

- 1 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood* (Heinemann: Reading, 1986; first publ. 1977), p.25.
- 2 Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa*, Book Two, *Violence and Ethnicity* (London: James Currey, 1992), hereafter Lonsdale, p.340.
- 3 On-going debate on HIV/AIDS threatens to make it so.
- 4 According to Lonsdale, the concept of a united Gikuyu tribe is imaginary. They lived quite separate lives in divided geographical terrain loosely linked as were Kamen and Makuyu by the Honia river. Ngugi, of course, uses this natural fissure to demonstrate the ease with which the naturally occurring divisions enabled infiltration by outside ideas and forces.
- 5 Killam, G. D, *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1984), p.50.
- 6 *Tutikwenda Irigu* means 'we do not want uncircumcised girls.'
- 7 Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 4 edn (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938), hereafter *Facing*, p.119.
- 8 *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1983), pp.39-51.
- 9 In this conversation, Wanja's chances of advancement are compared to those of the boy Ritho, a classmate. Ritho wants to become an engineer. What is unimaginable in *Petals of Blood* is achieved in *Devil on the Cross*. In this novel, Wariinga, fourth in her class after three men, finally becomes an engineer.
- 10 Elleke Boemer's essay 'The Master's Dance to the Master's Voice: Revolutionary Nationalism and The Representation of Women in the Writing of Ngugi wa Thiong'o', on Ngugi's treatment of women is often quoted for pointing out just how entrapped Ngugi is by patriarchy and its structures. As in Williams, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, p.95.
- 11 Mutiiri: *Njaranda ya Miiikarire*, 1 (Newark: Mutiiri Abirika, 1994).
- 12 *Facing*, p.145. Kenyatta calls them sponsors.
- 13 Church of Scotland, *Memorandum prepared by The Kikuyu Mission Council on Female Circumcision* (Kikuyu, Kenya Colony: 1 December 1931), hereafter *Memorandum*, pp. 10, 22, 37. It is possible that Ngugi based Muthoni's death on the incident that sparked off the 'circumcision issue'. In April 1929, two women circumcisers were prosecuted and fined Kshs 30 each for forcefully carrying out a major operation on an unwilling girl. They were in breach of the Native Council directive to limit the operation to the minor procedure. It was argued, as in the case of the schoolgirl at Kikuyu who had hidden to avoid circumcision, that the circumcisers were unnecessarily brutal, almost as if punishing the three girls for resisting. Muthoni is Christian, and although she chooses circumcision, she also represents the forces against it.
- 14 Lonsdale, p.340.
- 15 Lonsdale, p.340.
- 16 Feminist revisionism offers challenges to this attitude.
- 17 An identical sense of disgust was felt by the missionary Dr. Philips when he observed ritual circumcision (*Memorandum*, p.12).

18 *Facing*, p.133-4.

19 Ngugi proposes education as the solution to the problem in *The River Between*. In *Memorandum* is the Government's argument as presented in the 'Report of the Native Affairs Department', 1929, Ch.2, Para.4, in which it agreed that:

Such an ancient custom cannot be abolished in a moment. It is hoped that it will be dropped gradually as a result of education in the widest sense of the word, just as such customs as the slitting of the ears, the plastering of hair with mud, and the extraction and filing of teeth are dying out slowly but all the more effectively because of non-interference. (*Memorandum*, p.67)

Government further argued that it wasn't its aim to prohibit, 'but to endeavour to get the people to see the evils of the operation, particularly in its severest forms [...] may constitute an offence of grievous hurt or maim.' (67)

20 *Facing*, p.132.

21 *Facing*, p.132.

22 Patrick Williams, *Ngugi wa Thiongo: Contemporary World Writers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) p. 32. Williams refers to the mass boycott of mission schools in favour of the Gikuyu independent schools for this reason. In the medical arguments presented in *Memorandum*, the most serious consequence occurs at childbirth, where both mother and baby might die.

23 See for instance Chapter 3 'Managing Women's Minds' in Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1985), pp.74-78. There is no corresponding evidence for Scotland. In *Unhappy Valley*, Lonsdale notes the growing popularity of male circumcision among the British middle classes around the time of the Gikuyu crisis to partially explain the intensive focus on female circumcision (p.388, n.427).

24 As of the garden hedge, for example? Indeed, Lonsdale, above, likens it to 'forest clearance' (p.340) Male writers in their description consistently trivialise clitoridectomy even while recognising its severity. In *Memorandum* is a note on the restriction of the operation to 'the simple removal of the clitoris', even as the same article points out the 'severe mutilation' that could sometimes result from the carrying out of this far from simple procedure (p.68).

25 Williams, p.32.

26 Showalter, p.78.

27 Showalter, p.76. Some of Brown's patients had complained of being coerced and tricked into treatment (p.77) In the speech that sealed Brown's expulsion Seymour Harden, Secretary to the Obstetrical Society said:

As a body who practise among women we have constituted ourselves, as it were, the guardians of their interests, and in many cases, [...] the custodians of their honour (hear hear). We are, in fact, the stronger, and they the weaker. They are obliged to believe all that we tell them. [...] Under these circumstances, if we should depart from the strictest principles of honour, if we should cheat or victimize them in any way, we would be unworthy of the profession of which we are members (p.78).

28 Showalter, p.76-77.

29 The church wanted to defer sexual activity to adulthood, within marriage.

- 30 There has been a resurgence of interest and reclamation of this ritual in Kenya. A sect called Mungiki, made up of young Agikuyu see the return to old values grounded in the rite of circumcision as the only way of reclaiming tribal morality and unity. Another sect, The Tent of the Living God (also *Thaai*), led by Ngonywa wa Gakonya share in this belief, and in December 1999 carried out a traditional circumcision ceremony at Dagoretti. Ten boys, now of the *Thingira* age group, were initiated (*The People on Sunday*, Nairobi, 26 December, 1999)
- 31 Carl G. Rosberg and John Nottingham, 'Cultural Nationalism', *The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p.112
- 32 In the majority of Gikuyu marriages even today, marriage occurs once the woman has conceived.
- 33 Lonsdale, p. 340. One of the consequences of urbanisation was the spread of venereal disease, some kinds of which cause infertility. Again on p. 386 Lonsdale reiterates Gikuyu men's concern, that the women's 'prostitution caused sterility.' There was a lot of reference to women as loose, or as prostitute. In this sense, therefore, Ngugi's metaphor of woman as prostitute is historically derived.
- 34 As noted in *Memorandum*, the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) used this ritual for political leverage. The missionaries claimed this action subsequently delayed female emancipation (p.7). The same report also refers to KCA as 'an indeterminate collection of malcontents, with no constitution, no representative authority and no constructive programme of reform' (p.26).
- 35 Compare the controversy generated by the suggestion that Mary Magdalen was married to Christ in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), for instance.
- 36 Williams, p.92.
- 37 Williams, p.93.
- 38 Lonsdale, p.391. In *Petals of Blood*, Nyakinyua's story demonstrates this point. Ngugi indubitably invests all power in the circumcised male. The disputed female circumcision is but preparation for the ultimate female right of passage. Nyakinyua, venerated bearer of tradition, says:

He was a man – he belonged to a race of men such as will never be. I know it: didn't he take me under the millet growth and I felt his power making a woman out of me, a girl? (*PB*, 324)
- 39 Lonsdale, p.xiv.

Mchongoano Verbal Duels: Risky Discourse and Sociocultural Commentary

Peter Githinji

Introduction

Mchongoano is a ritualized genre of verbal duel popular with the Kenya youth where one antagonist insults another or members of his/her family. Though ritualized, the topics involved mark it as a risky discourse that oscillates between verbal play and aggressive slurs depending on the context and social relationship between participants. *Mchongoano* is comparable to the 'playing of dozens' or 'sounding' among African Americans. It thrives on placing significant cultural signs in implausible contexts (Morgan, 1994). This implausibility, reinforced through exaggeration, sets a ritual interaction frame that ameliorates the aggressive humor. Morgan (1994: 333) observes that "...once the implausible or unreal state is established, these cultural signs interact with context through irony, sarcasm, wit, and humor in order to play with serious signifiers." This advantage notwithstanding, it turns out to be satire's greatest undoing because it is not treated with the seriousness it deserves. In this chapter, we treat *mchongoano* as a genre of verbal art discourse similar to African American dozens that rely on banter to make sociocultural commentaries.

Although typical *mchongoano* is a face-to-face dyad between two or more antagonists, we are only interested in the origin and interpretations of locutions rather than all the components of the communicative event as outlined in Hymes (1972:35-71). We begin with a discussion of the controversies that have dogged the verbal duel discourse, followed by a look at the dialectics of the origin of *mchongoano*. This will provide the background for the examination of some of the themes as they are treated in *mchongoano*. Towards the end, a brief discussion of the use of *Sheng*¹ as a linguistic device that promotes artistic creativity will be followed by concluding remarks. We advocate for the elevation of *mchongoano* to its rightful place amongst other common verbal performance discourses.

Mchongoano and sociocultural commentary

Mchongoano is contested from three main perspectives; firstly, it is predominant amongst pre-adolescents, specifically primary school children who are considered too young and uninformed to be taken seriously. Secondly, it has no respect for taboo topics that are frowned upon by mainstream society, and thirdly, it is channeled through *Sheng* — a linguistic hybrid that excites a lot of emotions from the elite, educationists, parents and language prescriptivists among others. These contentions notwithstanding, *mchongoano* is a multifaceted youth satire that employs the indirectness strategy to comment on serious issues. However, social commentaries are obscured by its surface humor, which is sometimes interlaced with aggressive insults, essentially inhibiting its serious analysis.² A closer look at examples (1) and (2) below for instance, shows that restricting our analysis of *mchongoano* to humor and insults completely misses the point:

1. Unafanya part time job City Mortuary
You work part-time at the City Mortuary
2. You are so corrupt mpaka mbwa zenu huitisha TKK³
You are so corrupt, your dogs demand TKK

Example (1) capitalizes on the stereotypical attitudes, and rumors associated with the City Mortuary. It evokes horrifying images of badly mutilated bodies of car accident victims, faces burnt beyond recognition, smell of death and decay, and sorrowful cries of people who have just seen the bodies of their departed loved ones. Due to society's fear of death, people who deal with corpses daily are regarded with awe. City Mortuary workers are, for instance, rumored to be eccentrics who use drugs and other intoxicants to help them cope with such dreadful work. The strength of the insult in questioning the sanity of the person it is directed to would have been lost if the background knowledge about the City Mortuary was not activated. Just like a good painter compresses so much information on one piece of canvas, the insult summarizes all the attitudes and beliefs that the society associates with death and morticians. In example (2), corruption as a vice is constructed around the metaphor of a guard dog. The guard dogs (police), are supposed to aggressively lead the war against corruption, but instead, they lead in its perpetration. Reports from bodies like Transparency International, Kenya Human Rights Commission and Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission have

constantly ranked the police as one of the most corrupt public institutions. A simple joke in (2) becomes a trope that captures the institutionalization of corruption by invoking our understanding of the role of dogs and the TKK culture. Both (1) and (2) demonstrates the need to pay closer attention to *mchongoano* as an intertextual discourse that draws from social texts in its social-cultural commentaries. This calls for a thorough examination of all its artistic manifestations, some of which falls outside its communicative context.

Background of the art of verbal duels: A discourse mired in controversy

The three major controversies dominating the literature on ritual insults especially the African American dozens revolve around their origin, gender participation and their functions. The first controversy was sparked by Dollard's (1939) and Abrahams' (1962) assertion that the dozens are an African American discourse. Ayoub and Barnett (1965) argued that whites also engage in the practice which cannot always be attributed to African Americans influence. This counter-argument was strongly criticized by Jackson (1966), who dismissed it as bad sociology on account of limited supporting data. Concurring with Ayoub and Barnett, Bronner (1978), and Labov (1972), were cautious to point out that white dozens are different from black dozens and that they are few and limited in terms of forms, themes and flexibility. Proposing a strictly Afrocentric perspective, Chimezie (1976) dismissed any possibility of an independent emergence of dozens among the whites. He compared the dozens with the *Ikocha Nkocha* game among the Igbos of Nigeria and argued that they are a carryover from Africa, albeit in a different form. We are sympathetic to Chimezie's arguments due to the dominance of the practice amongst African Americans and the lack of sufficient data to support existence of similar practices in other cultures.

The controversy regarding the gender of the participants in the dozens can be attributed to the fact that most studies were only conducted by male researchers and were therefore biased towards adolescent boys discourse (e.g., Dollard 1939, Abrahams 1964, Dundes et al., 1972, Kochman 1972). As a result, a wrong impression that girls do not participate was perpetuated. However, H. Rap Brown (1972: 206) reported that "some of the best dozen players were girls." It has also been reported in other studies that young

women are not only competent in ritual insults, but also engage in a unique discourse known as conversational signifying (e.g. Mitchell-Kernan 1972, Morgan 2002). To explain the perceived low participation, it can be argued that since ritual insults is an ingroup discourse, a lot of women are excluded because they do not form strong ingroups as compared to men. Following Tannen's (1998) analysis of the different interaction patterns of males and females, it becomes appealing to explain different genders' participation in ritual insults in terms of their respective interaction patterns. Boys' games according to Tannen, tend to be competitive and aggressive, while girls' games are geared towards interpersonal negotiation and cooperation. Current studies on language and gender (e.g. Lakoff 1975, Holmes 1997, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003) have criticized the earlier tendencies to look at women's interactive norm as an aberration of male speech. It has been noted for instance, that females control a wide range of linguistic styles as compared to males, and that the style they activate is dictated by the prevailing contexts. It follows that when making discourse choices, girls tend to choose cooperative forms from the range of linguistic options available to them (Byrne 2004), whereas boys select strategies which encode competition. Viewed from this perspective, competitive verbal practices like dozens should be more predominant amongst the males as opposed to the females. Byrne's words, "linguistic options available" are important because they do not deny women the ability to engage in ritual insults; it just is not the preferred discourse of the majority of females. We can predict a higher chance of competitive discourse in contexts that promote in-group bonding like prisons, school, prostitution, etc, because such activities promote group solidarity and intergroup competition.

The third issue concerns the function of the dozens. According to Dollard (1939), the dozens are a vent for misplaced aggression born of frustrations and discrimination of the blacks by the whites. On his part, Abrahams (1962) narrowed down on the persistent reference to the mother and attributes the practice to the daily reality in the Black families. The absence of the father in a many black families conferred the reigns of familial authority to the mother. It is common amongst the youth throughout the world to challenge institutional authority, and the mother slurs are a symbolic rebellion against institutional authority represented by the mother figure. Abraham's view tallies with Dundes et al. (1972) interpretation of the Turkish boys' verbal dueling. Their analysis, hinged on the centrality of the phallus, points to the

disdain extended to all things feminine. This disdain finds expression in ritual aggression to the mother whose betrayal during the traumatic circumcision ceremony is responsible for the boys' anguish.

With respect to *mchongoano*, these three views may be contested on the basis that *mchongoano*'s primary function is socialization. It is not a way of expressing pent up frustrations or rebelling against institutional authority, though it does challenge the social norms by confronting them head on. In addition, not all *mchongoano* participants undergo the rite of circumcision. As such, Lafever's (1983) proposal that dozens were a mechanism for social control among peer groups seems more plausible because a lot of self-control is required for someone to stand the slurs directed at him or close family members. This view places ritual insults as an art with a socialization function. Our examination of *mchongoano*, however, goes beyond socialization, extending the functions to the representation of various shades of social reality.

Before turning to the themes in *mchongoano*, a discussion of the dialectics of its origin is in order. Since it capitalizes on both global and local reality, we shall begin by examining the African American influence and then proceed to local cultural influences.

African American Influence

Over the years, African American culture has become the world's dominant popular culture (Bell 1999). African American stars in the entertainment industry like sports, music, and cinemas have a wide following amongst the Kenyan youth. Thanks to the influence of the mass media, it is not uncommon to hear Kenyan urban youth using African American catchphrases, curses, profanities and an occasional AAE accent. The connection is further enhanced through Sheng hip-hop music that blends the local, Jamaican and African American styles. In addition, young Kenyans who have migrated to America have contributed to the adoption of African American speech styles which were hitherto unknown. This cultural contact has resulted in the proliferation of African American jokes into the Kenyan discourse. Thanks to the high-speed interaction facilitated by the internet, a joke heard in New York can be passed to countless internet users across the globe within minutes. Kenyan websites like www.mashada.com, www.kisii.com, www.kissfm.co.ke among others have become important sites in which participants share familiar discourse like *mchongoano* purely for amusement. The fact that some websites have more

than two *mchongoano* threads demonstrates its popularity among Kenyans. A closer examination of these jokes, however, reveals that some are directly borrowed from African American dozens and then ‘Shengnized’ or modified to reflect the Kenyan reality. For illustration, I provide some glossed examples of *mchongoano* from different internet forums and their counterpart in the ‘yo mama jokes’ from the African Americans.

- a. wee mdark mpaka ukikanyanga makaa unaacha footmarks za black!
You are so dark that if you step on charcoal you leave black footprints
 Yo mama’s so black, she can leave fingerprints on charcoal.
- b. wee mjinga mpaka ulithrow jiwe kwa floor ukamiss!
You are so stupid that you threw a rock to the floor and missed
 Yo mama’s so stupid she threw a rock on the ground and missed
- c. Budako mjinga mpaka alifail blood test
Your father is so stupid that he failed a blood test
 Yo mama’s so stupid, she studied for a blood test and failed
- d. mathako amekonda...alimeza meatball na budako alifikiri ako pregnant
your mother is so skinny that she swallowed a meatball and your father thought she was pregnant
 yo mama’s so skinny, she swallowed a meatball and thought she was pregnant.
- e. mathako mnono alifall in love na akaivunja
your mother is so fat that she fell in love and broke it
 Yo mama’s so fat, she fell in love and broke it

In these jokes, the possessive noun phrase (NP) subject ‘yo mama’ that appears in all African American insults may be substituted with other NP subjects in *mchongoano*. We also note the evidence of a hybrid discourse in the Swahili-English codeswitching. However, a closer look at preferred attributes (e.g., *black, foolish, skinny, fat*) and the structure of these jokes (i.e. subject in the matrix sentences, optional complementizer, and the comment about the attribute) shows similarity in both *mchongoano* and ‘yo mama jokes.’ Such similarity and pervasive borrowing provides the best support for the African American influence in *mchongoano*. Establishing the extent to which the internet translation of ‘yo mama jokes’ feed the face-to-face *mchongoano* is an arduous task that is beyond the scope of this chapter. Future research might shed more light on this relationship. For our present purposes, whether *mchongoano* is printed on the internet or performed face-to-face, all are

treated as parts of a Kenyan discourse. In any case some of the borrowed *mchongoano*, unlike the examples above, undergo a lot of modification which gives them a completely Kenyan outlook. Example (a) above for instance has the variation in (f) below;

- f. wewe mblack hadi ukikanyanga kiwi unawacha footprints
you are so black that if you step on kiwi shoe polish, you leave footprints
 Yo mama's so black, she can leave fingerprints on charcoal

The comparison of blackness in (f) is between charcoal and *kiwi*, the most popular shoe polish brand in Kenya. The substitution of 'charcoal' with the '*kiwi*' is a Kenyan innovation without an equivalent in 'yo mama jokes'. In this joke, one has to understand that although *kiwi* shoe polish comes in different colors, black is the prototypical polish for the majority of Kenyans. Such recasting of 'yo mama jokes' to reflect the Kenyan reality is also evident in (g).

- g. Wee ni mstupid, msee alikushow uchukue buu #8 kwenda Jeri, ukachua #4
 twice
You are so stupid, someone told you to take bus number 8 to Jericho, you took number 4 twice
 Yo mama so stupid when she went to take the 44 bus, she took the 22 twice instead

Although route no. 22 (Uthiru) and route no. 44 (Kahawa West/Kamiti) exist in Nairobi, we note the avoidance of complete borrowing of 'yo mama jokes'. Instead, other familiar routes like no. 8 (Jericho, Kibera) and no. 4 (Eastleigh, Satellite) are used, or routes 22 (Uthiru) and route 11 (South B). Another modification might be to say that one missed bus or *matatu*⁴ number 4, took number 8 instead and disembarked halfway. Any route divisible by 2 can be used to create such kind of *mchongoano*. While examples (a) to (e) above provide clear evidence of borrowing from African American jokes, (f) and (g) show that failure to appreciate the Kenyan youth's artistic input misrepresents the discourse. This manifests itself in linguistic modification and the substitution of African American concepts with local signifiers. Local input can also be conceptualized by exploring the influence of traditional folklore on *mchongoano*.

Influence from traditional verbal Folklore

Frustrated by the earlier writers' reluctance to seriously consider the African origin of African American dozens, Chimezie (1976) turned to African folklore as the locus for interpreting the dozens. Citing the Igbo's *Ikocha Nkocha* game, he claimed that similar verbal genres existed throughout Africa. Our proceeding discussion on the influence of traditional folklore on *mchongoano* genre is inspired by Chimezie's argument. As a socialization discourse, *mchongoano* involves negotiation of status through the cultivation of self-esteem. Raising one's self-esteem involves undermining that of others — a common practice in traditional folklore. Swahili traditional poetry for instance, has a genre of self-praise and boast poetry in which a poet boastfully displays his artistic prowess while dismissing his contemporaries as inept and incapable of challenging him. In the example below, Ahmad Nassir's (Ustadh Bhalo) poem *simba mwenda pweke* 'a solitary lion' provides a good illustration;

Simba mwenda pweke

Ndimi simba ndume ndimi, ndimi mwelevu wa nyina

Niwazingae wasemi, kwa huja wakadangana

Ndimi mkingama ndimi, zisipate la kunena

Mungautambika mwina, na kunena jifunzeni

Malenga wa Mvita (1971)

I am the mighty lion, the expert of puzzles

Who surround the talkers, till they gather in awe

I bind the tongues, till they have nothing to say

You should set a puzzle, and teach yourself how to speak.

Ustadh Bhalo adheres to the artistic requirements of a typical Swahili poetry structure, i.e. 16 syllables per line, and faithfulness to middle and end rhymes [mi] and [na] respectively. He boastfully challenges fellow poets with claims of invincibility. By comparing himself to the lion, regarded in African folklore as the king of the jungle, he elevates himself to royal status, implying others should pay homage to him. He is an expert in solving puzzles (poetically) as well as setting puzzles that others cannot decipher. He portrays fellow poets as worthless because they can't match his talent. This boasting constitutes a devastating face threatening act (see Goffman 1967), to other poets. They are left with no alternative but to give a poetic response to neutralize the

challenge. Failure to respond would mean that they agree with his claims. Their face negotiation involves symbolically dethroning the king and defacing him artistically. An authentic scenario of such a poetic performance is reported in Kimani Njogu's (2004) account of an exchange between Shaha and Bwanrehema;

Shaha

Mgeni aingia kwa shango	<i>The visitor comes triumphantly</i>
Na kunivundiya milango	<i>Breaking my door</i>
Sitavumiliya magongo	<i>I will not withstand bangings</i>
Kiwa ni wanaume ngonjani	<i>If you are men, await</i>

Bwanrehema

Shaha usishike urongo	<i>Shaha do not start lying</i>
Sisi hatukulala lango	<i>We did not sleep by the doorside</i>
Henda tukicheza kwa shingo	<i>We came dancing with our necks</i>
Inuka twenende gunguni	<i>Awake, lets go to the gungu</i>

Shaha

Eeh! Chaa	<i>Eeh! Chaa</i>
Eeh mumenilia mabwana	<i>You have pleaded with me gentlemen</i>
Mwanichuchulia zijana	<i>You have brought young women with you</i>

(I have taken liberty to alter the chronology of the verses)

In the above performance, Shaha, who is held in high esteem for his poetic wizardry, enhances his self-importance by claiming that the villagers would go to any length to secure his participation at the *gungu* ceremony. A symbolic war scenario is artistically presented when Shaha implies that he is ready to fight them (poetically) and they will have themselves to blame for provoking his wrath. In the framed context of the performance, Bwanrehema, Shaha's antagonist accuses him (Shaha) of being evasive and challenges him to join others at the *gungu* ceremony. Bwanrehema's poetic prowess is manifested in his ability to spontaneously match Shaha's composition with strict faithfulness to poetic structure regarding the number of syllables per line, and the rhyming end syllables [*ngo*]. In the last stanza, Shaha insists that Bwanrehema and his group are so keen to secure his participation that they go to the extent of appeasing him with young women. From these two examples, we can see the relationship between the jocular performance in Swahili traditional poetry and the banter that we encounter in *mchongoano*.

Traditional folklore can also explain the origin of obscenities in *mchongoano*. During the Gikuyu⁵ circumcision season, use of obscenities by the initiates was sanctioned under the framed context of a cultural ritual. Here, the norms of everyday moral codes were suspended as is common in carnivalesque practices.⁶ During this period, young men could address women in vulgar language and engage in both physical and verbal contests to gain the girls' admiration (Mbugua, 2003). The festive season acted as an arena where masculinity was displayed both physically and verbally similar to a courting dance. No study has yet been done to determine the influence of Gikuyu vulgar idiom on *mchongoano*, but since it dominates other local languages in its lexical contribution to Sheng—the linguistic medium of *mchongoano*,⁷ its effects cannot be ignored. In addition, the Gikuyu people constitute the largest ethnic group in Nairobi, which also raises the possibility of their dominance in the use of *mchongoano*. We take the Gikuyu example of obscene discourse as an exemplar of similar discourse amongst other Kenyan communities. This is further support for our proposal that traditional folklore should be put at the forefront in any discussion of the origin of *mchongoano*.

Themes in *mchongoano*

It is surprising that Kenyan scholars have not paid attention to *mchongoano* as a form of arts probably because they do not want to soil their hands in 'filth'. As Mbugua's (2003) study of matatu discourse has shown, some things that might be dismissed as trivial such as matatu stickers can act as floating signifiers of the semiotic system of a culture or subculture. Accepting the legitimacy of *mchongoano* as an important aspect of youth discourse opens the doors for the extraction of sociocultural commentaries that are sometimes coated in 'horrifying' obscenities, ridiculous exaggerations, and absurdities. Like other forms of art, *mchongoano* will be viewed as both raw material as well as by product of social reality. Examination of the themes through which these commentaries are mediated promotes our understanding of how *mchongoano* draws from the social environment and the role it plays in the transformation of social reality. While space limits our examination of all possible themes, we hope that the few examples we shall give will demonstrate the richness of the discourse, setting pace for a more exhaustive study in the future.

Representation of poverty: Pictures of scarcity and marginalization

In *mchongoano*, the subject is normally an adjectival attribute expressed in phrases such as *wewe mzee* 'you are so old', *kwenyu wapoor* 'you are so poor', *wewe mrefu/mtall* 'you are so tall', *mathako mfat* 'your mother is so fat,' etc. In the majority of *mchongoano*, poverty is the most dominant topic, packaged in images of starvation, filth, illiteracy, ignorance, poor shelter, small house, lack of TV/ small or old TV, ridiculous breakfast menus, crime, prostitution and rural marginalization, among others. These images are popular because they strike a familiar chord that the majority of the Kenyans can relate to. In the Society for International Development (SID) report (2004), the gap between the rich and poor was shown to be so wide that for every shilling a poor Kenyan makes, a rich Kenyan makes 56. Art, as a mirror of society, cannot evade portraying this reality, hence the dominance of poverty themes in (1) through (9). Images of poverty may be directly mentioned as in (1) or implied as in (2).

1. umesota sana mpaka ukifika kwa streets za Nai kubeg, mabeggars wanakupatia doo zao
You are so poor that if you go to Nairobi streets to beg, beggars give you their money
2. Ati family yenu nyinyi hushare underpant moja
That your family shares a pair of underpants

The possibility of a poor person being assisted by beggars who themselves depend on passers-by's magnanimity is quite remote. Still, a commentary of abject poverty is presented in its harsh reality. Beyond the surface humor, (1) can be seen as a metacommentary of third world poverty where harsh economic conditions render the citizens unproductive. In desperation, they beg for handouts from the government, which in turn rushes to the 'development partners' like the Bretton Wood institutions and multilateral donors with a begging bowl. The erasure of the boundary of who is, or a beggar is not renders the insult in (1) ritual since it can apply to just about anybody, from the street beggar to the government. In (2) the dire situation is evaluated by our conceptualization of underwear as very personal items. Sharing underwear erodes the dignity of the people involved. Yet, the commentary goes beyond mere obscenity. While sharing of clothes is common practice amongst the poor, the impossibility of sharing underwear is erased when we

take into account the proliferation of *mitumba* (secondhand) underwear, which are hawked in broad daylight at various stalls. At the national level, *mitumba* has not only killed the local textile industry, worsening unemployment and poverty, it has also led to the loss of national dignity. Besides begging and sharing of underwear, poverty is also depicted through images of poor shelter as in 3-5;

3. Nyumba yenu ni ya matope, makauzi wakicome, wanawika ‘fungua ama tukojolee’
Your house is made of mud such that, when thieves come, they shout ‘open or else we urinate on it.’
4. Hao yenu ni ya nyasi makauzi wakicome, wanawashow ‘fungua ama tulate ngombe’
Your house is made of grass, when thieves come they tell you ‘open or else we bring the cows.’
5. Hao yenu ni ya makaratasi, makauzi wakicome wanawika ‘fungua ama turarue’
Your house is made of paper, when thieves come they shout ‘open or we rip it off.’

Mud-walled huts in rural areas have their counterparts in mud-walled shacks in urban informal settlements. In (4), grass-thatched huts in rural areas are contrasted with shacks made from paper boxes (cartons) and plastic bags in the slums in (5). The three examples further intensify the images of poverty in marginalized rural areas and the informal settlements in the urban areas. Houses are supposed to function as forts to protect their inhabitants from the elements and unwelcome intruders, but they offer none of these. Fires, floods, and wind cause great devastation to the inhabitants of these houses. In addition, thieves gain access with relative ease. The introduction of thieves in these examples adds another dimension of poverty—crime. While it can be claimed that a thief who steals from the poor must be even poorer, the sad picture is not lost that urban crime spares no one, the rich and poor alike. My next two examples are responsible for the oft cited notoriety of *mchongoano*.

6. Ati Shiro and Boni wamesota mpaka wanarecycle condom...inside out ... guess what...they are blessed with quadruplets
That Shiro and Boni are so poor that they recycle condoms inside out...guess what... they are blessed with quadruplets

7. Dame wa Toni ni kuro (langu) huko K-Street ana p**y mbili, moja ya kionjo alafu moja ni ya kulipa.

Toni's girlfriend is a prostitute on Koinange street⁸, she has two vaginas, one for trying out and one for charging.

Our interpretation of (6) begins with the background knowledge that in Kenya, it is normally the poor people who have large families. This can be blamed on ignorance and inaccessibility of reproductive health facilities. Past efforts by the government to introduce reproductive health education in schools have always been opposed by among others, conservative clerics who argue that sex education encourages promiscuity. The clergy's advocacy for abstinence has not worked; instead it has resulted in widespread ignorance about safe sex as shown in (6). In (7) prostitution is presented as an occupation of choice although in the majority of cases, poverty is to blame. Although the oldest profession remains illegal in Kenya, the fact that the practice goes on a stones throw from Nairobi's Central Police station can be viewed as government support. After all, VIPs, including legislators are some of the prostitutes clients! This collusion is just one of the double-standards that have long been exhibited by successive governments in Kenya since independence.

Resource distribution in Kenya has always been skewed to the rural areas' disadvantage. Lack of rural investments in basic infrastructure further promotes poverty and inequality, which intensifies the rural-urban migration in search of better lives. The SID report (2004) cited above shows a gradient pattern in rural marginalization. Northern Kenya and other Arid and Semi Arid Areas (ASALs) have borne the brunt of this neglect from the colonial times through successive post-colonial governments. This is represented in examples (8) and (9) by exaggerated images of dryness, isolation and remoteness.

8. Kwenyu ni mbali mpaka nyi hushika TV programs za jana leo

Your place is so far that you receive yesterdays TV programs today

9. Kwenyu kumedry mpaka ng'ombe zenu huproduce powdered milk.

Your place is so dry that your cows produce powdered milk

People from marginalized areas are always a step behind because they compete with the rest of Kenya on an unequal footing. Inability to receive information at the appropriate time contributes to further marginalization. By the time

they receive information about programs designed for their betterment, others have already taken advantage. The humor of cows producing powdered milk in (9) is a commentary on the devastating effects of drought in the ASALs. Not only do their livestock cease to produce milk, their chief form of nourishment, but they also die in droves, condemning the people to further impoverishment.

Space does not permit the discussion of all the images of poverty that come out of *mchongoano*. Such images as of filth, overcrowding, many children, poor diet, illiteracy and so on can all be attributed to poverty. Let us now contrast these images of poverty with those of affluence.

The other side of the coin: The images of affluence

The juxtaposition of images of poverty with those of affluence in *mchongoano* mirrors the side by side coexistence of the upmarket and the downmarket residential areas. The poor youth's dream is to live in comfort like their counterparts in the affluent neighborhoods (see Githinji, 2006). Comfort to them is having the basic needs like food and shelter, rather than the primitive accumulation or conspicuous consumption they see exhibited by their affluent neighbors. In *mchongoano* the rich people are mocked for their opulence by their depiction as leading wasteful lifestyles. They own large underutilized houses, high maintenance cars, go on foreign shopping sprees, and other vanities as shown in 10 through 14.

10. Nyumba yenu ni soo ukitokea backdoor uko ocha
Your house is so big that if you exit through backdoor, you are in the countryside
11. Ati nyinyi wasafi hadi mnaosha waru na Omo⁹
That you are so clean that you wash potatoes with Omo
12. Hao yenu soo iko na room 50 na 49 ni bafu
You house is so big, it has 50 rooms and 49 are bathrooms
13. Nyinyi ni wadosi mpaka aerial yenu ni ya Nike
You are so rich that your TV antenna is a Nike model.
14. Kwenyu mko sophisticated mpaka viti za sitting room zina safety belts
You are so sophisticated that seats in the living room have safety belts

Nairobi, a city of approximately 3 million people, has a disturbing pattern of population distribution. The population density between the rich and the poor areas is 3000:2-25 people per hectare. It is also estimated that over

50% of Nairobi population occupies a mere 5% of the total residential area (Olima 2001, Mitullah 2003), while less than 30 % occupies 95% of the total residential area. This reality is represented in *mchongoano* by depicting a small house with some people sleeping in sinks (poor — no space) as compared to a house that stretches from the city to the countryside (rich — more space than necessary). In (11 and 12), the rich people's obsession with hygiene is regarded as a vanity. To the poor slum dwellers without access to clean water, hygiene is a luxury they can ill afford as captured in *nyi wachafu mpaka mnajipanguza miguu mkitoka nje* 'you are so dirty that you dust your feet when going out'. To the rich however, the issue is not whether you are clean but the quality and value of the items you own or use to become tidy, hence the boastful pride in showing off imported perfume, toothpaste, suits etc. Examples (13) and (14) illustrate how people indulge in unnecessary sophistry. These images of affluence sharply contrast with the images of poverty discussed in the previous section.

The parody of Religion

There is a Kenyan joke that the sectors that have recorded rapid growth in spite of poor economic performance in the last two decades are the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and religious organizations such as churches. The NGOs have been infiltrated by unscrupulous people whose sole mission is to exploit genuine causes as avenues for self-enrichment. On the religious scene, Kenyans have seen it all; from preachers who persuade you to 'invest' by 'donating' to God's work so that he can multiply your wealth a hundredfold, to those who 'declare' barren women past child-bearing age pregnant¹⁰, and faith healers who demand a fortune before they 'cure' people of incurable maladies like HIV / AIDS. In an atmosphere of disillusionment and dysfunctional institutions, people turn to divine intervention for solutions to all their problems. *Mchongoano* is not a discourse of religion bashing, but some of excesses and irrationalities of religion are satirized as in 15-17.

15. Mmeokoka mpaka mnapianga ugali na msalaba

You are so saved¹¹ that you make ugali¹² using a cross

16. Ati ukila peremende lazima useme grace mwanzo

That when eating candy you must say grace first

17. Dog yenu imeokoka mwizi akicome inamshow 'iba tu mungu anakuona'

Your guard dog is so saved that when the thief comes it tells him “just go on and steal, God can see you”

Using religious instruments as cooking utensils in (15) is just as ridiculous as saying grace before eating candy (16). We also see a clash between the foreign norms of worship and the traditional religious practices. The Christian practice of invoking religion on every issue seems ridiculous and sometimes irrational to those who confine religion to ritualized contexts. In example (16) excessive religious practice is shown to trivialize religion by reducing the mysticism associated with communing with God. Today, ‘getting saved’ has taken center stage in evangelical, protestant and even Catholic denominations and other sects. Christians are exhorted to strictly follow Jesus’ teachings. But these teachings are portrayed as impractical in some situations and pose a dilemma of whether to subscribe to strict Christian morality in a secular context where everyone is not bound by the same code. The ‘turn the other cheek’ doctrine is therefore challenged in (17). By satirizing religion, *mchongoano* seems to recommend practical solutions to social problems rather than seeking divine intervention.

Political commentaries

Although almost every sociocultural issue has a political angle, there are some issues which society unambiguously recognizes as politics proper. In *mchongoano*, this is accomplished through the use of satire that ridicules people’s inaction as responsible for the entrenchment of the status quo. Unlike other themes where political connection is indirect, political *mchongoano* provides direct reference to events, entities and personalities. Every time the names of familiar political events or personalities are mentioned, all the political discourses associated with those events or personalities are immediately activated. An arena for exposing and contesting the status quo whilst also recommending possible solutions is therefore provided as shown below.

18. Sura kama rungu ya man Toro

Face like the (former) President Moi’s club

19. Redio yenyu ni mzee mpaka saa hizi ndio Leonard Mambo anadeclare state of emergency

Your radio is so old that this is the time broadcaster Leonard Mambo is declaring the state of emergency

20. You are still an active Kanu youth winger mpaka underwear yako imechorwa Saitoti akiosha vyombo
You are still a KANU youth winger such that your underwear has a picture of Saitoti washing dishes
21. We mshamba mpaka unaishianga Nyayo stadium na githeri kwa mfuko wa shati na koti kwenda kupraise Moi
You are so backward that you go to Nyayo stadium with you shirt and coat pockets stuffed with githeri, to praise Moi

There is nothing wrong with the former Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi's club in (18), rather it is what it symbolized during his 24 year reign (1978-2002). The association of Moi's club with repression, torture, economic mismanagement, corruption, and other social ills, makes it an object of spite. Mention of the club activates the hatred for the regime's political dispensation, while drawing a laugh in the process. Kenyans had no problem with Moi as a person, but with his presidency. This has been demonstrated by their willingness to listen to him on numerous occasions after his retirement in 2002. Example (19) recalls the 1982 abortive coup when a renowned Kenyan broadcaster, Leonard Mambo Mbotela was forced to go to the studio to announce the military takeover. Commenting on the activities of the KANU youth wingers in (20) activates memories of the terror associated with the group in the late 1980s and early 1990s in their zeal to enforce the then ruling party, KANU's policies. (20) may also be taken as ridicule of the people who choose to follow political parties with a dubious past. Finally, (21) questions the wisdom behind blind loyalty to political order that impoverishes the people to the extent that they cannot afford quality food, surviving instead on the poor diet of boiled corn and beans. The voters are put on the spot for giving unquestioning loyalty to the political leaders who are responsible for their poverty.

All in all, *mchongoano* encompass every area of Kenyan reality. The few areas we have covered demonstrate how issues that appear trivial on the surface can be exploited to make serious socio-cultural commentary. As Geertz (2002) description of Balinese cockfighting and Mbugua's (2003) floating signifiers of *matatu* culture have shown, ordinary events that are normally ignored can be the microcosm of a whole social discourse.

The linguistic medium

The linguistic channel of *mchongoano* is a key element of this verbal discourse. Since Swahili and English are mainstream languages identified with institutional authority, conducting *mchongoano* in Standard Swahili or Standard English, for instance, signals a shift from the joking mode to a serious mode. Sheng as a marketplace language in the sense of Bakhtin (1968:16) is characterized by an ambivalence that gives it latitude in which to signal a non-serious exchange. It exploits this ambivalence to make commentary on serious social issues while hiding under the cloak of satire. Unlike English and Swahili, it preserves humor because it is not bound by the prescriptive standards associated with mainstream languages. One obvious advantage of hybridity is the preservation of linguistic signifiers from donor languages which cannot be fully captured by the recipient language as shown in the example below.

- Sheng: We kwenda unaflaiflaingi everywhere kama Nairobi fly
Swahili: *Wewe nenda, unapaapaa kila mahali kama nzi / mdudu wa Nairobi*
Gloss: Go away, you fly everywhere like Nairobi fly

The Swahili translation has shed a lot of humor that characterizes this type of verbal exchange. The Swahili lexical equivalents for certain concepts like Nairobi fly,¹³ not only render the statement ambiguous, but also unnecessarily wordy. In Sheng, the codeswitching phenomenon salvages the humor as well as solving the issue of wordiness. Such cases illustrate why *mchongoano* is so successful in Sheng but not in either English or Swahili. Similarly, we note that ‘yo mama’ jokes are delivered in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as opposed to Standard English. A lot of humor would be lost if they were delivered in Standard English. The tendency for folklore genres to take liberty with linguistic transgression to create humor seems to be a cross-linguistic phenomenon.

Conclusion

The vitality of traditional verbal art relied on its oral nature. Constant performance in festivals and traditional ceremonies accorded the flexibility that enabled the performers to make modification to reflect the prevailing reality. In addition these festivals and ceremonies ensured the continuity and survival of artistic forms by providing ideal forums for the transmission from one generation to another. The colonial government’s ban on traditional

festivals such as *gicandi* performances (see Kimani, 2004) is one example where a genre of verbal performance was almost driven into extinction. Enter the print and electronic media and the scenario was further complicated. While the printing and recording of oral performances aided in the preservation of some art forms, it also brought copyright laws that prevented alteration of recorded material. This denied verbal art the flexibility to change with reality which eroded its relevance. Inability to recast themselves in contemporary contexts rendered many of these genres unable to respond to the youth's expressive needs.

In addition, globalization has added new dynamics that cannot be wholly accommodated by a traditional worldview. Take the riddle about a house with one pole, for example. Interpretation of this riddle requires the ability to map the relationship between a mushroom and the architecture of thatched houses. To a rural person, this is easy and straightforward, but the same cannot be said for an urban person. The two perceive and interpret reality differently because they are shaped by two different cultural environments.

The modern Kenyan youth is faced with a conflict of identities. Different shades of his multifaceted identity are manifested in the traditional heritage of parents, peer group culture, and the global culture mediated by institutions such as education and the media among others. Expecting all these shades of identity to be accommodated by the traditional worldview is not realistic. The creation of a hybrid language like Sheng is the outcome of a need to have an expressive medium to reflect oneself. In order to fit into the transformed world, new art forms that represent that world have to be evolved. The popularity of Sheng hip-hop, and *mchongoano* should be viewed from this perspective.

In summary, the marginalization of a discourse that reflects the reality of a group, just because it does not appeal to the aesthetics of a section of society is similar to the colonial ban of certain African dances because they deemed them obscene (see Kimani 2004). Failure to pay attention to *mchongoano* is a luxury scholars of verbal art can ill afford. A golden opportunity to learn about the youth's artistic creativity and how their cognitive development is influenced by their interactive behavior should not be bypassed.

Notes

- 1 Acronym for **Swahili English** slang (see Mazrui 1995). It is a mixed language used by Kenyan youth based on Swahili syntax, with lexical borrowings from Swahili, English and other Kenyan languages.

- 2 This is not limited to *mchongoano*. In his book *Rabelais and his World*, Bakhtin (1968:145) admits that the marketplace and billingsgate elements of the Rabelais' novels alienated his readers.
- 3 Abbreviations for **Toa Kitu Kidogo** literarily translated as 'Give something small' — a euphemism for bribes. Its other variants are **Toa Kitu Kikubwa** and **Toa Kila Kitu** — give something big, and give everything, respectively (Mbugua 2003).
- 4 *Matatus* are privately owned commuter vehicles acting as alternative means of transport. For a thorough understanding of the *matatus* and *matatu* culture see Mbugua's (2003) dissertation.
- 5 Populous ethnic community in Kenya. Traditionally, they lived in the areas around Mt. Kenya, but have spread out to various parts of the country.
- 6 In the Bakhtinian notion of carnivalesque practices, the carnival "celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin 1968: 10)
- 7 George Wakaba (personal communication 2006), claims *mchongoano* can be conducted in other linguistic medium and not just Sheng. He cites examples he has used such as *matako juu juu kama breki ya honda*, 'high butts like Honda brakes' and *umeparara kama nooi ya farasi* 'you are rough like a horse's butt'. However, my definition of Sheng gives more importance to the lexicon where words such as *nooi* and *breki* would count as Sheng (see Ogechi 2005 and Githinji 2006 on Sheng's lexification).
- 8 Dubbed the 'red light district' by the local media. It gained national prominence in December 2003 when a local Daily alleged that a Member of Parliament, an Assistant Minister and a Minister had been arrested soliciting for sex, in a police crackdown on street prostitutes.
- 9 A popular detergent powder.
- 10 A good example is Pastor Gilbert Deya, who was accused of using his ministry in the UK as a conduit for child trafficking.
- 11 A referential term for 'born again' Christians.
- 12 Staple dish prepared by mixing corn flour and boiling water.
- 13 *paederus crebipunctatis* or *paederus sabaeus* $\frac{3}{4}$ an orange black and white beetle that does not sting, but releases pederin toxins that sting the victims and leave an ugly rash. The bug was attributed to the *El Niño* weather phenomenon that devastated Kenya in 1997. Literal translation into *nzi/mdudu wa Nairobi* is ambiguous. It might mean a certain fly, or any kind of fly in Nairobi.

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Sports and Games in Kenya and their Role in Society

Mwangi Peter Wanderi & Muya Francis Gateru

Sport and society have had, all over the world, a very close, symbiotic relationship throughout the ages. For instance, as variously documented, human successful evolution has been greatly facilitated by physical fitness acquired through physical activities, games and sports of one kind or the other. Through physical activities, games and sports of various kinds, individuals and/ or societies have perfectly acquired and nurtured their physical fitness as well as greatly pacifying themselves at the social, political and economical levels. This has enhanced their adaptation and survival. This chapter examines the role of physical activity, games and sports in Kenya and the extent to which they specifically enhance individual Kenyans lives, and that of the Kenyan society in general. Feasible recommendations are also advanced. The chapter commences with definitions and progresses to the role of physical activities, games and sports in the indigenous, and present day Kenyan communities.

Towards a definition of society, play, games, and sport(s)

The Collins English Dictionary describes society as “a system of human organizations generating distinctive cultural patterns and institutions and usually providing protection, security, continuity, and a national identity for its members” (Sinclair, 1994 p.1, 466). This definition clearly implies that a society is a composite of functional institutions, whose primary objective is to help sustain that society through provision of the greatly indispensable requirements such as “...protection, security, continuity and a national identity”. This is precisely the role of sport and games in a society as a functional social institution.

A game is a physical activity with formal or informal rules by which players must abide. Participation in a game may be for physical fitness, fun, relaxation, leisure, prestige, recognition, status, or a combination of these motives among others. A game may be competitively or non-competitively played, where one may lose or win due to skill, strategy, or luck or a

combination of two or all of these (Ituh, 1999). Games may be verbal, physical or mental while others combine either two or all of these three aspects. Physical activities, which are fairly informal, are considered to be “play” while those that are formal are considered to be “games.” However, when games assume very elaborate rules and regulations and become much institutionalized, they are considered to be sports. So these four occur in a continuum from fairly informal activities on the one hand, to very formal, and highly institutionalized activities on the other.

The above definitions would be incomplete if two other related terms go unmentioned. These are the terms “physical education” and “recreation”. Physical education as described by Kiganjo *et al.*, (2004) is a school subject that aims at a total or wholesome development of a learner through the use of movement. Physical education aims at contributing towards the “... improvement of the quality of life of the learners through imparting of knowledge, skills and attitudes to participate in a variety of sports and recreational activities and acquire fitness for health enhancement and development... to help reduce incidences of cardio-vascular and obesity related ailments such as blood pressure, heart diseases, stroke, low back pain and diabetes” (p. 2).

Finally, the term “recreation” refers to the activities engaged in by people during their free time or at leisure. Etymologically, this word comes from the Latin word “*recreatio*” which means “*that which refreshes, rejuvenates or restores*” (Kraus, 1978, p. 32). Thus, recreation is the voluntary engagement in well-chosen activities for pleasure when one is free. Such activities must not be negative either to the participant or to anyone else in the community or even to the community in general. This participation must help to restore the individual for other heavy obligatory activity or work (Klaus, 1978; Wuest & Bucher, 2001). Thus, if one decides to dance, play or even to drink for recreation, it must not have any weakening effect on the individual, whether physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, mentally, or financially. In other words, the activity must refresh or rejuvenate the person for a better performance in other obligatory activities that are to follow.

The role of physical activity, games and sports in indigenous Kenyan communities

As mentioned above, the focus of this chapter is to assess the extent to which

sport as a vital social institution has been utilized or failed to be utilized in Kenya for the benefit of individuals and society. This owes to the fact that throughout human evolutionary history, societies and individuals have very deliberately and successfully enhanced themselves via sports (Adams, 1991). This has consequently led to the gradual growth and development of sport into one of the most formidable social institutions within society as well as its grand perpetuation over the ages (Coakley, 1982). From a functional perspective, sport has been found and confirmed variously to be a socio-cultural institution which has been perpetuated across the human history to the present day due its significance and is intricately interwoven in peoples' lives (Coakley, 1982; Adams, 1991).

The indigenous Kenyan communities enjoyed a rich variety of games and various other physical activities, which were intricately interwoven in their culture and were part and parcel of everyone's way of life. Unique traditional games, sports and dances existed within these communities in which children, youth and adults participated (Mwaniki, 1980; Nteere, 1982; Kenyatta, 1992; Wanderi, 2001). These games were a valuable part of the indigenous Kenyan communities' culture and served as important mediums for the acquisition of factual information, intellectual and motor skills, cognitive strategies, and positive attitudes.

At the level of the traditional culture in Kenya, physical activity and games had a collective, life enhancing, functional inclination. They enhanced the acquisition of skills required for all round maintenance of life. Thus many anthropologists contend that in the traditional cultures, games for children and youth enhanced the acquisition and practice of skills required for the gradual growth and preparation to adult life (Adams, 1991; Kenyatta, 1992; Wanderi, 2001). Besides, for both the young and the old, physical activity, dances and games were an important means of recreation. Playfulness was greatly valued for children and youth. The childhood and youthful periods of life were generally characterized by an impressive amount of controlled freedom that enabled abundant participation in physical activities of various kinds. For instance, the role-play games, which were numerously engaged in by young children, were an important means of recreation and a training ground. Young girls mimicked adult female roles while boys imitated and practised the adult male roles in their respective communities (Thomas, 1966; Kipkorir and Ssenyonga, 1986; Kenyatta, 1992). As children and the youth spontaneously ventured into playful activities of various types, the communities viewed

this participation as a vital forum for the acquisition of skills needed in their future lives. This also enhanced acquisition of various personality traits, which were greatly venerated within the communities such as strength and courage. Younger children played mostly at home while the older youth went outdoors to participate in a variety of games (Kenyatta, 1992; Wanderi, 2001). On the over the whole, the role of games and play in the lives of children and youths was very well acknowledged and the communities cherished the playful, active tendencies. Unfortunately, as girls approached puberty, they were socially withdrawn from these games. However, their earlier collective participation in these activities in the company of their male age mates was considered indispensable means to their future growth and development into strong women while boys acquired the necessary traits to become strong future warriors and fathers (Kenyatta, 1992; Mwaniki, 1980; Wanderi, 2001). In other words, these games were encouraged as they inculcated into children and youth the socially esteemed daily duties-related and/ or warfare-related skills. These were skills seen as necessary qualities for operations in future life as male and female adult members of the society, for perpetuation of life and communal survival.

Among all the Kenyan ethnic communities, there were dances in which everyone participated. These dances were social fora for displays of skill, good health and physical fitness both among the children and the old alike. Amongst the various Kenyan communities, the warriors vigorously danced, drilled and displayed their fighting skills via parrying activities executed publicly amid music and dance especially when preparing for war or at leisure during important social occasions. These activities were vital training fora for warriors' acquisition of physically fitness and confidence (Kenyatta, 1992; Wanderi, 1999 & 2001). Through vigorous rhythmic shaking and twisting of various parts of the body; the head, legs, shoulders, hands and the hips which characterised dances in various communities, such as the Kamba and Luhya of Kenya, the dancers' body fitness was greatly enhanced. The Maasai performed a lot of vertical jumps on the spot as they danced while "...the Kamba graced their dances with periodic acrobatic feats of flips and somersaults" which led to proper exercise and greatly improved participants' health and strength (Senoga-Zake, 1986).

Dances were an ingenious invention of the indigenous African communities for the purpose of achieving various objectives within their own society. These objectives included acquisition of fitness for all. Additionally, traditional dances

within the ethnic communities were also a vital means of bringing people together and enhancing social cohesion, a means of expressing feelings such as of joy or sadness, a means of passing and preserving vital information from one generation to the other, a means of motivation, and a means of recreation. Dances were also fora for communication to God as was the case with the Kelome dances of the Kamba community. Finally, more often than not, just like the games and sports in today's world, dances were a vital catharsis for dissipation of excessive libido among the members of the community. For instance, some unique, highly frenzied dancing activities which were referred to as *mûmbûro* amongst the Gikuyu, *ngîro* amongst the Embu, and *kîguumi* amongst the Meru were very deliberately encouraged amongst the youth of the Mount Kenyan region and one of their objectives was to dissipate the excessive youthful libido (Wanderi, 2001).

Physical activity, games and sports in Present day Kenya

According to Kiganjo et al., (2003) the objectives governing provision of physical education, games and sports at schools and in the community should be related to the needs of the society. Although we have had these activities in our schools and in the community since the colonial period, due to the poor introduction and presentation by the colonial system, they were originally not based on the need to train Kenyans to be independent but to be better dependent servants of the Queen. This unfortunate background continues to impact adversely on the institution of physical activity and sports in Kenya. Thus full benefits have so far not been achieved and the situation needs to be corrected to be in line with the Kenyans' needs as explained by Kiganjo et al., (2003);

There are several individual and societal values and benefits generated as a result of participation in regular programs of physical education and sports. They include intellectual, organic, neural-muscular, social, cultural, emotional and aesthetic values. Some examples of the specific values are:

- Acquisition of skills and knowledge in the performance of sport, recreation and other co-curricular activities.
- Learning to participate in various physical activities, and appreciate their contribution to individual physical fitness and overall societal health.
- Acquisition of knowledge of one's physical abilities, challenges and how to adjust to them.
- Acquisition of sportsmanship/ sportswomanship and a sense of fair play.

- Cultivation of self discipline, respect of authority and others.
- A gain in self confidence in activity performance and cultivation of a strong personality that generates leadership, co-existence and a sense of belonging.

... Learners of different ages, ability and social-cultural background (shall) participate together. This (participation) results into teamwork, togetherness, social interaction, unity, harmony, leadership, fellowship, cooperation, and general understanding of each other... learning of rules and regulations of the game... All these eventually result into the application of correct attitudes to daily life (p.3).

In a nutshell, these objectives are a reflection of the needs of the contemporary Kenyan society. Unfortunately, due to the apparently poor introduction of these activities by the colonial system, these objectives are only partly achieved. However, all has not been lost; there is room for improvement. With a proper, professional refocus on our implementation strategy coupled with good will from the policy makers, a lot more would be reaped within a short time. This calls for an amendment of the national policies governing provision of physical education and sports in Kenya in order to achieve full benefits.

In order to have the best achievements from physical education and sports, first and foremost, the full benefits of physical education, games and sports in the society should be very well outlined. Everyone in the school system and community at large must be made aware of these benefits so that we all strive to achieve them individually and communally. This is what has lacked all along. Unless one is shown the reason (philosophical question of “the why”) behind a certain action, one is not likely to develop a liking for that action. In other words, the “why” of physical education, games and sports should accompany the “what” as explained by Wuest and Bucher (2001). Also, proper methods must be used and adequately trained personnel must be provided. Once this is properly done, the following benefits would be realized.

Benefits of physical activity, games and sport in Kenya today

The benefits of participation in physical activity, games and sports by the members of a society are very diverse. These are the benefits to be achieved through the physical education curricula as well as co-curricular games programs in schools, colleges, universities and the community based sports programmes. They are also the benefits that have enhanced the growth of

games and sports into becoming one of the most popular and indispensable social institutions as well as its perpetuation over time. These benefits are grouped into the following categories.

Physical activity, games and sports as a means of achieving physical fitness

The physical education and games offered in schools are meant to enhance physical fitness in the learners. As the popular saying goes, “*Mens sana in corpore sano*”, a healthy mind will only be housed by a healthy body (Clarke and Clarke, 1978, p.3). This is not only true for the pupils in schools but is also true for the men and women out there in the community. The latter is what is supposed to be achieved through the community sports and recreational programs. This owes to the fact that inadequate physical activities in human beings have been medically related to the onset of various “hypokinetic conditions”. “Hypo” means, “too little” and “kinetic” means “energy” or “activity”. A “hypokinetic condition” is therefore an infirmity caused by lack of adequate energy expending physical activities or too little regular exercises (Powers and Howley, 2001). Physical education, games and sports are therefore, first and foremost, supposed to offer this life sustaining purpose by helping reduce incidences of hypokinetic conditions through active and regular participation as exemplified below.

There are a number of infirmities, diseases or body weakening conditions that fall under the category of hypokinetic conditions all of which can be reduced or be prevented through physical activity. These include heart diseases, diabetes mellitus, lower backache, depression, ulcers, migraine headaches, and obesity. A sedentary person, that is a person whose lifestyle is characterized by inadequate physical activity, further tends to have a weak heart (cardiac) muscle. The cardiac muscle responds to physical activity just as the skeletal muscles do. When one runs, or performs any physically exerting activity which at least leads to sweating, the heart is challenged to raise its pace to keep up with the increased requirements for nutrients (oxygen and glucose) and removal of waste products of metabolism such as carbon dioxide and lactic acid. As the heart raises its pace, this helps to strengthen its muscles such that with time, its efficiency in pumping blood is improved. This phenomenon is important in aiding in the reduction of hypertension, improvement of coronary circulation as well as in enhancing cardiac rehabilitation (Powers & Howley, 2001). Besides, it is quite common for sedentary people’s arteries to

become clogged up with cholesterol. Through physical activity, cholesterol is washed away and new capillaries are developed (Powers & Howley, 2001).

Underutilization of skeletal system leads to its atrophy or degeneration. This is exemplified by the observations made when one fractures a limb and it is immobilized during treatment. Such a limb becomes very weak due to loss of both the lean muscle and the bone tissues. The latter occurs due to decalcification leading to a condition referred to as osteoporosis, which means the development of brittle, and much weakened, porous bones which are very vulnerable to breakages (Powers & Howley, 2001). Exertion of pressure on the skeletal system including both the muscles and the bones through physical activity enhances their development where the skeletal muscle hypertrophies through the increment of the muscle protein while the calcification of bones is enhanced to become hardened and resistant to breakages. Additionally, the ligaments and tendons are also strengthened.

In a feature in the *Daily Nation* of Wednesday, November 24th 2004 entitled, “*Is Your Child a Couch Potato? Lifestyle That is a Health Risk*”, it was indicated that there is a great concern amongst experts over the alarming rate of the rise in the number of unfit, overweight children in our society, (Chebitwey, 2004, p.1-2). According to this article, medical experts fear that, in Kenya, a combination of inactivity and junk foods are fast leading to the existence of a generation of obese children (and obviously of adults too) who weigh more than their bodies can handle and hence predispose themselves to various obesity-related diseases.

The author of the article above quotes a Nutrition Manager with Nestle Foods warning that the couch potato lifestyle, which is apparently becoming common in Kenya today, “...is a ticking time bomb and such children (are likely to) face an unhealthy adult life and risk developing heart disease and diabetes” (p.1). Sports and physical activity are a vital element in a young person’s life. They have immense health and social benefits and lay a foundation that children will hopefully take on through to their adulthood. The same article cites a case of a parent who transferred her child from an academy, which had no serious physical activity programmes to another one whose physical activity programmes were more seriously followed after realizing the child was becoming more and more obese. The author goes on to quote a children’s soccer team coach who strongly advocates that parents must be at the forefront in inducting their children into games and various kinds of

physical activities through themselves participating in them as role models. In the same article, revelations are made with regard to the role of physical activity and sports in children, namely;

Research shows that, half the children aged between 12 and 21 are not physically active on a regular basis, and regular attendance of physical education classes is declining rapidly among high school students. Team sports can help combat the increasing population of inactive kids. Parents need to encourage young children to participate in team sports... There are psychological as well as physiological benefits of keeping fit. Building self-esteem and camaraderie and developing problem solving skills in a team setting are a few of the bonuses children receive from team sports. Research has shown that, teenagers who take part in sports are more self-confident than others of the same age who do not... It has also been found that, girls who take part in sports have a better body image, eat more healthily and are less likely to smoke and drink as much as their couch potato peers. However, when introducing children to team sports, parents should de-emphasise competition and emphasise having fun. If their first sports experience is positive, children are more likely to pursue other physical activities throughout their lives. But if their first exposure is negative, they may end up choosing a sedentary lifestyle, (p. 2).

There are several issues brought to the surface by the above columnist. One, the way we introduce games and physical activity to children determines their future participation. As strongly argued out in a previous section, Kenyans' poor participation in physical activities today owes much to the poor way through which this is inducted to them in schools. Little effort is made to let them know the "why" of what they are being put into. As a result of this poor teaching of physical education and sports, the recipients never relate physical education and sports to their own lives. They perform the activities sometimes very well but all to please the teacher. Once they are away from the teacher, they forget and abandon everything. Consequently, Kenyans have failed to learn appropriate ways of spending their free time despite this being one of the objectives of the physical education and sports programmes in schools. The majority of Kenyans are completely uninformed of the above cited benefits of physical activity to their own lives and so even when they are free, instead of indulging in physical activity oriented behaviour for their own good health, thousands of them might rush to a beer hall and "poison" themselves with uncontrolled amounts of beer and *nyama choma* (roasted meat). This is a self-debilitating lifestyle and must be corrected urgently by preaching a health-oriented "gospel" to all and sundry now, not tomorrow.

The second vital reminder highlighted by the columnist is on the physical and psychological benefits of physical activity. On the physical side, there is the worry of self-predisposition to obesity related diseases due to poor diet coupled with inadequate or no activity. For instance, exercise is a significant means for control of diabetes mellitus. Diabetes mellitus is a defective condition of the body, which occurs in either of two ways. First, is the inability of the pancreas to produce sufficient amounts of the hormone insulin. This type of diabetes is also referred to as Type I diabetes mellitus or juvenile on-set diabetes because it may occur in children and mostly among young adults. The second type is the body's inability to use the insulin, which has already been produced by the pancreas. This is referred to as Type II or non-insulin related diabetes mellitus. Type II diabetes mellitus occurs mostly in adults older than 40 years and comprises of more than 90% of the diabetes incidences. Depending on the type an individual is suffering from, the control involves insulin injection for Type I, as well as diet control and exercises for both Types I and II. If not controlled, diabetes may lead to other very serious complications including the damage of the eyes, kidneys, and nerves as well as increased risk of heart diseases, stroke and other complications. The crucial issue here is that obesity predisposes one to Type II diabetes mellitus by contributing to the tissues insensitivity to insulin. In other words, as explained by Professor Martin Silink (*Daily Nation*, Thursday 11th November, 2004, p. 18), by avoiding overweight tendencies in a society, the diabetic incidences would be reduced by half. Besides, for those who may be suffering from either of these two types of diabetes, well performed exercise minimizes the effects by lowering the blood sugar level whereby the required insulin dosage will be reduced in the case of the Type I diabetes victims. Unfortunately, people are ignorant of these facts to the extent that they are daily predisposing themselves and/or their children to a medically risky lifestyle.

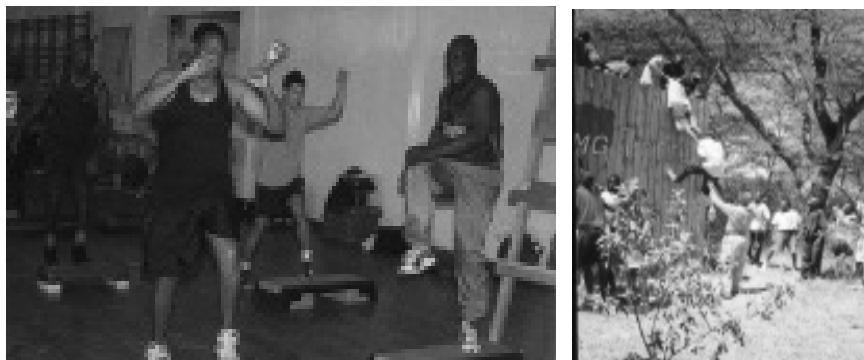
The use of exercise or physical activity as a means of relaxation, and also as a therapy for tension and depression can never be over emphasized. It is a well-known fact that after a hard piece of work, one automatically feels a need to stretch up and relax the muscles. This is proof that the body yearns for exercise that it is denied. Jogging, swimming, or any other physically exacting activities are good for the relaxation that the body so much requires. We are also familiar with situations where people suffering from forms of tension and anxiety are treated to medical doses of tranquilizers. However, it has been established that all what can be achieved through these very highly

addictive drugs can simply be achieved by the use of physical activity and well conducted exercises. Besides, after such an exercise session aimed at fighting tension or anxiety, one will always remain alert as opposed to being sleepy and incapable of engaging in activities like driving which require good amounts of concentration. Additionally, these drugs are not only very expensive but render one to be highly dependent on them with time. Exercise and sports, when well planned and presented may indeed be a panacea to many health issues that we find challenging us in the society.

Apparently, more and more people today are becoming informed on the negative consequences of obesity following the increased information in the print and electronic media. Unfortunately, the way to avoid or reduce obesity still remains unknown to them. If physical education was seriously taught in schools, everyone would be aware of the fact that the only beneficial way to avoid or reduce obesity is by observing a physically active lifestyle as well as minding how much food and what kinds of food one eats. This would be part of the theoretical knowledge that would be inculcated into learners as a way of showing them the “why” of physical education, games and sports. But, due to lack of the right knowledge, unscrupulous businesspersons have come up with an almost ready answer to the public quest to fight obesity. Thus, the classified pages of the dailies will every day bear advertisements such as, *“Fast weight Loss, come attain your dream body shape in a week”, “Swift Safe Weight Loss; no hunger, no aerobics, no gym, no herbs, no pills, no belts, no creams, no shots, no G5”,* and so on. All these are commercial gimmicks meant to make money out of people’s ignorance because there are no two ways about a healthful weight management procedure other than proper diet and exercise. If only people were well informed, they would not waste their money on useless electrified gadgets fitted on their waists to give them the “miraculous weight loss in a week without diet nor exercise.” The worst scenario is where some people ingest commercially acquired pills to “slim without exercise.” These slimming pills will always have adverse side effects on consumers. If physical education and games were seriously taught, individuals would acquire the right attitudes towards physical activity oriented lifestyles for optimum health.

Fortunately some Kenyans seem to have got it right today. A number of gymnasia or health clubs in the urban centers and at various institutions including the Universities and Parliament building have been established. Various hotels today have introduced very modern gymnasia fitted with the latest state-of-art equipment. Unfortunately, the government has

not established a mechanism of vetting these “gyms” and “health clubs” to ensure proper techniques are used to “train” the much-uninformed clients. Professionals in this area such as Kenyatta University’s Department of Exercise, Recreation and Sports Science have actively responded to this need by establishing short courses on Fitness Training. Additionally, many Kenyans are venturing into outdoor recreational pursuits either organized in families or at the work place whose participation refreshes, entertains and unites all those involved. This has greatly boosted domestic tourism leading to emergence of a locally, vibrant leisure and recreation industry.



PHOTOS A and B: Kenyans are increasingly engaging in outdoor recreational pursuits; this participation refreshes, entertains and unites all those involved.

The socio-economic befits of physical education, games and sports

Given the health-related benefits of physical activity, games and sports, it goes without saying that if one remained fit and obese free through proper diet and physical activity, medication expenses would be greatly reduced. This benefit is very strongly related to the health and therapeutic benefit of physical activities expounded above. More specifically, physical activity, games and sports are a potent means to economic prosperity from individual to corporate and national levels because of the money an individual, an organization or even the government would save as a result of either reduced or even totally non-existent medical bills. Besides, the less sickly the population, certainly the more productive it becomes, leading to better earnings. Hence, the concept of industrial recreation has emerged where factories, industries and corporations both private and governmental have embarked upon a notable provision of recreational programmes for their employees. Although this is still at its very

preliminary levels in Kenya, situations are well familiar where government and non-governmental corporations provide sports clubs and various sportive opportunities to their workers. Likewise, provision of sports programmes in the community as well as in educational institutions, military barracks, and police forces and so on are efforts geared towards this objective.

In this regard, it should therefore be observed here that if proper provision of physical activities in schools were done well, there would be a greater acceptance of the call to participate in such programmes by members of the public. Apparently, people do not have the right attitude towards active participation in physical activity and hence there is still big room for improvement. They need to be helped to cultivate the predisposition towards physical activity right from their school days as per the well-outlined objectives in the schools physical education curriculum. The best way of achieving this is through more active teaching of physical education in primary and secondary schools. Learners are supposed to develop positive attitudes and carry on with physically active behaviour to their old age, irrespective of profession.

Despite the apparent low-keyed presentation of physical education, games and sports in contemporary Kenyan society, this discipline has no doubt helped quite a number of people to rise in the socio-economical ladder. According to an article carried in the *Daily Nation* of Monday, July 24th 2006 entitled, “*Kenyans Chase Their Dream in Europe; Professionals Seek to Play Where the Grass is Greener*” (p. 11), a list of 22 Kenyan football players who were playing abroad by July 2006 was provided. These are Kenyans who probably would have been unemployed if they were at home but they have obtained better prospects abroad. For instance, the *Standard Newspaper* of Friday, September 1st, 2006 featured the success of one youthful Kenyan soccer superstar, Dennis Oliech, saying he is a real achiever in France. He drives the latest two-door state-of-the-art BMW for which he paid about Ksh 4 million and lives in a Paris suburban 5 bed roomed house worth 37 million shillings. This is not a small achievement by any standard.

However, there are critics to this idea of Kenyans and Africans in general migrating abroad to look for greener pastures through sports. For instance, in an article carried by the *Daily Nation* entitled, “Gaddafi hits at Fifa for ‘Slave Market Football,’ ” the Libyan leader President Muammar Gaddafi criticized the world football governing body, Fifa, for what he termed as a reactivation of “... slavery and enslavement and trading in human beings ...” from poor countries in Africa to Europe and America (*Daily Nation*, Tuesday June 13th

2006, p. 40). Probably, such criticism is incorrect for these players were obviously not compelled to leave their mother countries to work abroad. Besides, they all were of cognizance that through active participation in soccer abroad, their earnings were to improve. There are however, some very unfortunate cases where individuals are conned by sports agents into signing empty contracts abroad. Proper mechanisms should be put in place by the relevant Ministry or the Department of Sport to vet such contracts to save athletes. Thus it may be unfair to condemn the numerous sports-related employment opportunities abroad because many Kenyans have had their lives changed through these opportunities. Besides, there are Kenyans who have so far benefited greatly from the study scholarships, which are sometimes offered to athletes abroad. These athletic scholarships have led to many Kenyans' personal aggrandizement. Fortunately, an effort towards recognizing and rewarding Kenyan players/ runners so that they are retained here in the country is being implemented (*Daily Nation*, 23rd August, 2006). It should also be noted here that, the number of Kenyans participating in the Grand Prix and other very well paying sports fora abroad has notably risen. Through this participation, these athletes make lots of money much of which they bring back to Kenya hence becoming a source of foreign income.

It is also appreciated that these opportunities are unlimited if only sports were given more emphasis by making physical education an examinable subject. Many people who have talent for various sports disciplines never get to discover their talents due to lack of conducive environment in schools. Accordingly, a lot of talent goes to waste, unutilized. In a situation where we are decrying lack of employment, this would provide employment to many youths. Thousands would serve as physical education teachers, sports instructors, and coaches while the talented ones would enjoy handsome payments either locally or abroad. A good example of this was the August 2006 handsome monetary awards to the winners of the World Junior Athletic Championships held in Beijing, China and African Championships in Mauritius. They were awarded a total of Ksh 13.5 million by the Government of Kenya through President Mwai Kibaki as a motivation and an appreciation, for their exemplary performance (Mbaisi, 2006).

Other benefits of physical activity and sports in Kenya

Since early 1990s Kenya has made frantic efforts to control the spread of the deadly HIV/AIDS pandemic through enlightening campaigns. Sports, dancing and music have offered very potent fora for this campaign. Many musicians since 1995 have come up with excellent musical ways of passing HIV/AIDS related messages in order to caution Kenyans on the need for behaviour change. Likewise, numerous dancing occasions have successfully served as opportunities for creation of HIV/AIDS awareness and behaviour change campaigns. The national soccer team, the Harambee Stars also joined other Kenyans in 2003 by producing a well-worded strong message on a photo poster with then Minister in charge of sports, Hon. Najib Balala (*Daily Nation*, Tuesday, 8th July, 2003, p.22). This is because the popularity of physical activity, including dance and sports, naturally helps to draw the attention of people enabling powerful transmission of vital messages aimed at changing society's attitudes in any aspect of life. To this end then physical activity, games/ sports are found to be potent fora for shaping the society. The right attitudes are very easily inculcated through these fora. Both in a community or in a school set up, one way of controlling or managing people's behavior is through physical activity. Both extroverts and introverts have challenging personality characteristics, but are very easily managed through sports. This is the reason why games in schools are a vital means for controlling strikes as well as controlling the mental predisposition of the masses within the entire society (Coakley, 1982). Through physical activities, games and sports, individuals get to master their own social world through constant opportunities for fast decision making as well as the respect for social etiquette. This aids in forming individuals' character as well as nurturing leadership traits in them.

Sports serve as fora for improving international diplomacy. The introduction of all Africa Games which were hosted by Kenya in 1987, the African Military Games which Kenya also hosted in 2002 as well as the East African Inter-universities Games hosted in 2005 are good examples. The exemplary performance by the Kenyan long distance runners abroad has tremendously helped to raise Kenya's reputation. This was the case in August 2006 when Kenya was once more brought into the international limelight during the World Junior Athletic Championships held in Beijing, China when the Kenya team surprised the whole world by trouncing China (host), USA, Russia and Estonia amongst others and emerged overall winners. However, the full potential can be achieved if the following recommendations are

effected.

Conclusion: Towards achievement of total benefits of physical activity, games and sports

At the beginning of this Millennium, the United Nations came up with the popularly known Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These were some aspirations that every member state of the United Nations outlined to achieve for the improvement of the welfare of the citizens. Physical activity and sports were identified as a potent area for the achievement of these aspirations due to their above mentioned benefits to the society. In order for these MDGs to be achieved most effectively in Kenya through physical activity sports, the following recommendations are important:

- Physical education and sports in schools should be properly implemented with the former made an examinable subject in order to help identify and promote sportive talents;
- Proper community based games and sports programmes should be enhanced in order to promote sports for all;
- Kenyans must strive to promote their culture through sports. Just as there is traditionally based attire, arts and crafts, etiquette and so on, so there should be traditionally based sports for the perpetuation of the Kenyan indigenous culture. This spirit should be promoted all over the African continent with particular indigenous games identified to be competed in throughout the African continent for cultural continuity and cultural identity.

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Building Bridges through Trichotomous Youth Identities in Kenya: Evidence from Code Choice

Nathan Oyori Ogechi

This chapter illustrates how the youth in Kenya build bridges in their language use. It argues that the youth are stakeholders in reversing the polarised political and inter-ethnic relations in the country. Besides engaging in debates of national cohesion and pulling together in anti-HIV/AIDS campaigns, the codes chosen for the purpose are important. Given the strong bond between language and identity, it is claimed that the prevailing triglossia is closely associated with trichotomous identities. The identities are projected not only through the grammatically stable codes and codeswitching but also the grammatically unstable codes. Premised on the 'we-code', 'they-code' and 'code-in-between' framework, the youth code choices at home and neighbourhood, school and work, and leisure places are treated. The paper concludes that there is need to appreciate the trichotomous identities of code choice in weaving a true national identity among the youth and by extension all Kenyans.

Introduction

It cannot be gainsaid that present day Kenya is dangerously polarised both politically and ethnically. Much of the polarisation in the country arises from narrow ethnic chauvinism and careless utterances that glorify ethnicity at the expense of national cohesion. An ethnic group is a human population whose members identify with each other, usually on the basis of a presumed common genealogy, or ancestry (Smith 1987). In this article, it is assumed that ethnicity is rooted in the idea of social groups, marked especially by shared tribal affiliation, language, or cultural and traditional origins.

The youth, who comprise a large percentage of the population, stand to suffer now and in the future unless the polarity gap is closed up. I define youth¹ as those in secondary school-going age and those who have completed tertiary

institutions and have just started their careers. This is usually between 13 and 35 years of age. These people have a role to play in bridging the polarisation in Kenya through forging national rather than ethnic identities. One of the key manifestations of ethnic and even racial identity is the code that people use. (Code is a cover term for language, dialect, etc. In this article, 'language' and 'code' are used interchangeably). In multilingual and multicultural Kenya, the different code choices that people make either identify them as Kenyans, different ethnicities, the youth or all of the foregoing. The present article attempts to demonstrate how the youth consciously, unconsciously or both build bridges through trichotomous identities seen in the code choices they make. The argument here is that the youth identify themselves first as members of an ethnic community (if they come from same ethnic group families), then as Kenyan youths and finally as citizens of Kenya regardless of age. This is what I call trichotomous identities. (The adjective "trichotomous" is derived from the noun trichotomy, which means division into three parts or categories). It is shown that this trichotomous identity is achieved through delicate balancing acts of code choice and code use patterns that the youth engage in daily. That is, when a youth chooses to speak a certain code, s/he is identifying with that code(s) and the social identity (social status) that is associated with it.

The article is organised as follows. In section 2, I present views from the literature while 3 sketches the conceptual framework. Kenya's sociolinguistic profile is drawn in section 4. The discussion of code choices and negotiation of identities is in 5 while section 6 is the conclusion.

Views from Literature

The definition of the term 'identity' is varied. For instance, Kroskritt (2000: 111-114) avers that identity is the linguistic construct of membership in one or more social groups or categories. On the other hand, Ndimande (2005: 63) contends that various categories constitute identity, namely, national, ethnic, cultural, social, linguistic, sexual and gender identity. Ndimande further says that identity is the set of characteristics that somebody recognises as belonging uniquely to him/herself and constituting his/her individual personality of life.

Regardless of the variations and the inclusion of non-linguistic criteria, there appears to be consensus that language is important and sometimes

crucial to the way members define their group as well as the way the groups define themselves (Mazrui 1995, Herbert 2001, Githinji 2006). This is perhaps why the relationship between language and identity has been explored for a long time (e.g. Yule 1995, Edwards 1985, Tabouret-Keller 1998, Thornborrow 1999, Kroskritt 2000, Herbert 2001, Kotze 2004). It has been observed that “language is increasingly being recognised in the post modern world as a central element in identity construction as other traditional markers of identity are being destabilised” (Kotze 2004: 64). Indeed there is a connection between the language spoken by members of a social group and the group’s identity. By their accent, their vocabulary, their discourse patterns, speakers identify themselves and are identified as members of this or that speech and discourse. In addition, Githinji (2006) argues that the relationship between language and identity has mostly been perceived in terms of ethno-cultural vitality. He cites the biblical account of a conflict between the Ephraimites and the Gileadites (in Judges 12: 1-6). Here, the Ephraimites’ inability to produce the alveo-palatal sibilant [š] in the word [sh]ibboleth, which they realise as [s]ibboleth was used to identify an Ephraimite enemy.

In his work, Herbert (2001: 223) has summed up the role of language in the negotiation of identity thus:

Social identity is recognized by insiders and outsiders as something that may be assumed, declared or negotiated; particular identities are achieved through social and cultural work. The behavioural mechanisms through which such marking is achieved are complex, but it seems to be a universal feature that linguistic differences are exploited for this purpose. Language is a central feature, if not *the* central feature, of such performance (emphasis in original).

The role of language in identity creation is crucial especially in post-colonial Africa. Here, language planning programmes for the official and national languages have given various languages special associations and identities. As Kembo-Sure and Ogechi (2006: 88) observe:

the desire to join the global techno-economic race persuaded some African leaders to opt for foreign languages as official languages (e.g. Ghana, Uganda and Zambia) whereas others opted for a mixed policy whereby an African language is co-official with a European language (Kenya and Nigeria). On the other extreme, there were some leaders who adopted an African language replacing the European language altogether (namely, Tanzania, Algeria and Somalia).

Functions assigned the official and national languages are identified with the speakers’ socio-economic status and/or the identity that one wishes to

project depending upon the situational context of a given speech act. They are identities of solidarity (one's ethnic group), out-group (other ethnic groups) and neutrality (one nation). These identities are for all language users regardless of whether they are youth or not.

However, concerning the youth, their identity has been associated with and even labelled 'youth culture'. Culture is the way of life including codes of manners, dress, language, religion, ritual, norms of behaviour and systems of belief. One of the behavioural norms of youth identity is associated with a sub-culture. This defies the mainstream culture and even goes ahead to use graffiti that does not observe language use norms as seen in graffiti writing (Scheeper 2004, Ogechi 2006).

Youth culture is also partly manifest in the youth's language choices. Language is not just denotational but it is also indexical as it denotes one's socio-economic and cultural identity (King'ei 2001: 3). The existence of youth languages for youth identification has been reported in Africa. Kiessling and Mous (2001) have discussed the birth of urban youth languages in South Africa (e.g. Tsotsitaal and Iscamto), Ivory Coast (Indoubil), Democratic Republic of Congo (Lingala ya Bayankee), Cameroun (Camfranglais), Kenya (Sheng and Engsh), and Tanzania (Bongo Fleva). Other youth codes have been identified in Uganda, e.g. Luyaaye. Each of these codes has a super stratum in a local stable code.

Kiessling and Mous argue that the genesis of the codes is the poor socio-economic living conditions in the crowded suburbs of the cities where the codes sprang up. They are also a slang that the in-group members invoke for their identity and solidarity on the one hand while they use them to lock out the out-group members (Mazrui 1995), on the other. Due to this, the codes are lexically unstable and have to keep on changing as soon as non-members learn them (King'ei 2001, Githinji 2006).

What is interesting is that inasmuch as these codes (for example, Sheng) originated and are in wide currency in the cities, they are slowly percolating to the rural areas (Ogechi 2003) and even among young adults (Githiora 2002). In fact, Sheng is getting native speakers in the offspring of street families (Githiora 2002). One aspect that should not be lost sight of is the fact that Sheng lexicon is not the same even in one Nairobi estate; rather each *baze* (local hang outs, where the bulk of members' interaction take place) within a given estate has its own unique shibboleths (Githinji 2006).

Youth identity is also manifest in the use of slang and pejorative terms (de Klerk and Antrobus 2004). The slang is typically localised and largely verbal, and functions primarily in order to show that one belongs to a particular sub-culture, to be witty or humorous, or to break norms, shock and show disrespect for authority (Ibid.: 264-5). The identity also seems to manifest itself in the trendy attire (Ngesa 2002) and rap music (Sampers 2004). Sampers interviewed Kenyan rappers who confessed that they

..feel the sense of responsibility toward their peers – Kenya's youth – and as the voices of their generation, they feel an obligation to promote the relevance of African heritage in young people's definition of self. Rappers take this role seriously; musicians interviewed said they try to convey important and locally relevant 'messages' to their peers through their music. Their lyrics confront social issues, frankly discussing sex, relationships, and AIDS, and serve as a call to revalorise culture. Kenyans have taken a Western art form and made it their own using Sheng, by using drums and African-inspired beats, and also using the 'reality of here' (p. 37).

The use of Sheng to break social norms and discuss topics that are considered taboo without any inhibitions is seen in inquiries into the language of sex and HIV/AIDS (Ogechi 2005). The study conducted among Moi University students (they are youth since a majority of them are in their early twenties) indicated that they discuss issues to do with the pandemic. However, they do so vividly in Sheng compared to any of the codes that they command, e.g. English, Kiswahili and their various mother tongues.

The works reviewed so far tend to show that the youth make code choices for every day communication and art (music) to identify themselves as a distinct group and therefore perhaps segregate themselves from the rest of society. If this remains so, then the polarised Kenyan society will be perpetuated and even worsened. However, what I demonstrate shortly is that the multicultural and multilingual Kenyan society brings out a youth with at least trichotomous identity – one that eventually bridges the differences in society and creates a Kenyan identity.

Conceptual Framework

This article is anchored on the 'we-codes', 'they-codes' and 'codes-in-between' framework. Initially propounded by Gumperz (1982), the framework was refined and expanded when Kamwangamalu (1998) discussed the identities of English and codeswitching in post-apartheid South Africa.

According to Gumperz (1982: 95), only two categories, namely, ‘we-codes’ and ‘they-codes’ exist. A ‘we-code’ is the language of the home and family bonds, the language one uses for informal activities and for interaction with one’s in-group members while a ‘they-code’ is the language for socio-economic advancement, the language associated with the more formal, stiffer and less personal out-group relations. This implies that only this two-way straitjacket categorization of codes exist in society.

However, Kamwangamalu observes that the dichotomous categorization of languages into ‘we-codes’ and ‘they-codes’ needs a redefinition in some speech communities such as the South African one that he studied. Here, for instance, the multilingual and multicultural situation calls for a third category which he calls a ‘code-in-between’. Unlike the ‘we-codes’ and ‘they-codes’, the ‘code-in-between’ is a neutral code that bridges the polarising codes.

In this article, I argue that whether or not a code is a ‘we-code’, ‘they-code’ or ‘code-in-between’ depends on two things. One, the socio-economic status that the code is perceived to represent in the given society must be considered. That is, is the code designated for official functions (e.g. education, international business, white collar jobs, etc.) and therefore elitism, national and inter-ethnic interaction or just intra-ethnic communication? Two, the linguistic accommodation and social perception (identity) that a speaker wishes to project also count. Speakers modify their speech to either converge or diverge from the speech norms of their interlocutors depending on the expected cost and rewards (Giles and Powesland 1975). When a speaker modifies to a code, s/he projects a ‘we-code’, ‘they-code’ or ‘code-in-between’. In addition, ‘whether a language qualifies as ‘they-code’, ‘we-code’ or ‘code-in-between’ is mainly dependent on the context of situation and on the type of social goals one wishes to achieve in a given situation” (Kamwangamalu 1998: 278).

Sociolinguistic profile of Kenya

Kenya is a multilingual and multicultural country. It has a population of African, European, Asian and oriental extraction. However, it is difficult to state the exact number of the languages spoken in the country owing to several factors. To begin with, the most comprehensive and much-cited language survey – *Language in Kenya* (Whiteley 1974) – was carried out over 32 years ago. It is unreliable as a lot of changes have taken place in

the past three decades. Secondly, other existing publications cite different and conflicting figures. For instance, a report of the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC) (2000: 95) puts the number at 70 while other sources (e.g. Webb & Kembo-Sure 2000) put it at 42. Part of this confusion arises from the difficulty of delimiting between language and dialect or the method used to determine the languages. It is obvious that direct inquiry about speakers' mother tongues as well as impressionistic assessment of a speaker's language would yield divergent responses. Thirdly, the birth of so-called urban youth languages such as Sheng and Engsh besides numerous other jargons complicates the question of tallying the number of languages in Kenya. Regardless of the foregoing complex language web, most inquiries prefer to use 42 as the number of languages spoken in Kenya (e.g. Myers-Scotton 1993, Republic of Kenya 1999, Webb & Kembo-Sure 2000, Musau 2003, Ogechi 2003).

African languages fall into three broad linguistic families, namely, Bantu, Nilotic and Cushitic. The Bantu family comprising speakers such as the Kiswahili, Gusii, Kikuyu, Luhya, etc. are the most numerous followed by the Nilotes (e.g. Luo, Kalenjin, Teso, etc.) and the Cushites (i.e. Somali, Rendille, Borana, etc.) in that order (Githiora 2002). Myers-Scotton (1993: 19) also observes that "even with the non-Bantu presence, Bantu groups clearly dominate in Kenya and, indeed, in all of East Africa. They represent 66 per cent of the population in both Kenya and Uganda." Kiswahili is the national and co-official language of Kenya and is supposed to portray its speakers' identity as nationalists. The rest of Kenya's African languages are for intra-ethnic communication and speaking them is largely for ethnic identification. English, the former colonial master's language, is also largely spoken. It is the official language as already indicated.

Besides, Kenyan immigrants, some of whom have settled in the country for a few generations speak Indian languages such as Punjabi, Gujarati and Hindi (Githiora 2002: 162). Alongside these are speakers of Arabic who are mainly business people especially at the coast. Increased trade between Kenya and the orient, especially Japan and China, has also seen a rise in the teaching and use of Japanese and Chinese in Kenya. The latter is preponderantly used in Chinese eateries.

In addition to these stable codes, there is a fast spreading but lexically unstable code called Sheng. According to Githiora (2002: 159):

Sheng is a mixed language that emerged from the complex multilingual situation of Nairobi city. It is mainly spoken by young people – preadolescents to young adults – and dominates the discourses of primary and secondary school children outside their formal classroom setting. Its syntax is basically Swahili, but through ingenious code-switching, it draws from the phonology, morphology and lexicon of Kenyan languages spoken in the city such as, but not restricted to, Luo, Gikuyu, Maasai, Luhya, and coastal languages such as Giriama and Taita. English is also an important source of many loan words in Sheng.

(1) is a Sheng example. Throughout the paper, Sheng is in *italics*, English is underlined, Kiswahili is in **bold**, while any other code is in ***bold italics***:

1. *kithora* *ma-doo* *z-a* *mathee*
 to.steal CL6-dough CL10-ASS mother
 ‘to steal my mother’s money’ (Abdulaziz & Osinde 1997:56)

It is notable that through a variety of channels, Sheng is also spreading to other urban centres and rural areas of Kenya (Ogechi 2002, Githinji 2006). It is also worth observing that Sheng is distinguishable from codeswitching at the lexical level in the sense that once the lexemes leave their source language(s) and are used in Sheng, they assume a new meaning (sense) altogether (Ogechi 2005b). Indeed, Githinji (2005 in Githinji 2006: 7) avers that Sheng is a lexical issue.

Further to Sheng is another rather dormant youth variety called Engsh. According to Abdulaziz & Osinde (1997: 49-50) “Engsh has English as the dominant donor language, which also provides most of the grammatical framework within which words from other languages are blended”. (2) is an example of Engsh:

2. *Si you akina pass for mwa morrows in your wheels, we do a swallow at them*
 Vuras
 “Come for me tomorrow in your car so that we can go for a drink at the Carnivore’ (mwa ‘me’; morrows ‘tomorrow’ them vuras’ ‘carnivore Restaurant’) (Abdulaziz & Osinde 1997; 55)

These languages are spoken in a presently polarised Kenya with ethnic chauvinism at its high noon especially since the failed November 2005 referendum vote. This has led to many Kenyans of good will to seek national healing. For instance, on the 21st of November 2006, one political party, NARC-K, launched a series of country-wide campaign rallies symbolised with

the waving of a white handkerchief calling for the bridging of the polarisation on narrow ethnic nationalism. The party appreciated the negative side that narrow ethnic identity can engender and therefore preceded the campaign by a video show of “Hotel Kigali” depicting the 1994 Rwandese massacre. The need to build bridges through ethnic healing appears to be top on the agenda of both sides of the political divide. Indeed, on the 19th November 2006, the Central Kenya Initiative (CKI), organized a similar ethnic healing initiative through the aborted prayer meeting at Nairobi’s Kamukunji grounds.

As indicated in section 1, the youth are the main stakeholders of the country’s future. They need to project a true national identity. I have already shown that language can be used to identify one. Yet in Kenya, we have the 42 or so languages, which signal different identities. In this multilingual and multicultural scenario, how do the Kenyan youth cultivate identities that eventually build bridges and Kenyan nationalism?

Code Choice and Identity Negotiation

It has been observed that “language behaviour in multilingual societies implies language choice for different purposes: it may be more useful, profitable, comfortable, etc. to use different languages or varieties of the same for different functions and develop corresponding patterns of language behaviour, often along a High-Low continuum related to social stratification and hierarchy” (Wolff 2000: 322). The various codes spoken in Kenya are used in a triglossic relationship, i.e. English is always High, Kiswahili is High or Low depending on the context of situation while other local languages are always Low languages.

In spite of this triglossic arrangement, the practical code choices that the youth make from the available repertoire displays trichotomous identities. It has been noted that linguistic choices are not only indices of social negotiations of rights and obligations holding between participants in a given speech situation (Myers-Scotton 1993) but also as linguistic capital that the participants in a speech situation use either to project power relationships or to achieve pre-determined, negotiation-free, social/political goals (Heller 1992). This is the basis upon which trichotomous identities are negotiated when the youth engage in code choice in speech. These identities are well explained along the ‘we-code’, ‘they-code’ and ‘code-in-between’ framework at home and the neighbourhood, school/college, work and leisure places.

Code choice and identity negotiation at home and neighbourhood

Kenyan families either comprise the same ethnic group or inter-ethnic marriages. In same ethnic families, both parents speak the same language to the children. Thus for these families, the siblings display identities of their parents' ethnic group through the choice of mother tongue. Here, Gumperz's (1982) 'we-code' choice of the native language is at play. In this case, English and Kiswahili are used with outsiders so that even Kiswahili (the national language) is considered a 'they-code'. This choice works very well in rural settings because the neighbours also usually share the mother tongue.

However, in urban settings, the 'they-code' and 'code-in-between' choices are manifest. The children usually "rebel" against their parents' mother tongue, which to them is a 'they (parents')-code'. The youth may be spoken to by their parents in mother tongue and they could understand it but they usually respond in a 'code-in-between'. In most cases, the neutral codes are three, namely, Kiswahili, English (if the parents and children know it) and Kiswahili-English codeswitching² (the alternate use of two or more codes in the same conversation).

A third identity is negotiated through the 'we-code' when the siblings use Sheng and/or English to isolate their parents. If the parents are young adults who also speak Sheng (Githiora 2002: 159), then "the youth may choose to *harden* or *soften* the linguistic boundary to mark their identity" (Herbert 2001: 224).

The trichotomous 'we-code', 'they-code' and 'code-in-between' linguistic choices and identities are replicated in inter-ethnic marriages and neighbourhoods. For example, Kiswahili and English are 'codes-in-between', depending upon which language the family opts to use. Most families use Kiswahili-English codeswitching as the 'code-in-between'. In this case, the mother's and father's native languages are the 'they-codes'³ while Sheng is the 'we-code' for the children. With neighbours, Kiswahili is the choice usually and it is taken as the 'code-in-between'. The neighbours' home languages are 'they-codes' but Sheng is the 'we-code' for the youth (children) of all families. In urban settings and peri-urban settlements with multi-ethnic settlers like Molo,⁴ the trichotomous youth identities are useful in building bridges for national healing. The youth may learn and speak the parents' languages. This is good in enhancing the country's rich cultures. However, the language that

usually takes root for every day conversation is Kiswahili. If they happen to be school-goers, some codeswitching and Sheng will be used as the code-in-between.

Code choice and identity negotiation at school/college and work

In this category, I discuss code choice in schools and colleges. I also focus on code choice in places of work during working hours, breaks (e.g. lunch) and at leisure places such as eateries and sporting places. Given that a large proportion of the Kenyan population are the youth, it logically follows that they comprise the students and a large percentage of the Kenyan workers. Here again a replay of the trichotomous identity is witnessed.

In schools and colleges (including universities), code choice largely follows the language in education policy. That is, the various mother tongues are only languages of education for the first three years of elementary education in rural areas while Kiswahili is used in urban and peri-urban schools. After Grade 4, English takes over as the medium of instruction while Kiswahili is a compulsory taught and examined subject up to Grade 12.

In reality, however, policy and practice are not always in tandem (Wolff 2002, Kembo-Sure & Ogechi 2006 a & b). In many primary schools, children have a 'they-code' (English) forced on them through rewards and punishment (Ogechi 2003) for using or not using English. The pupils in turn resort to a 'we-code' in the absence of teachers, outside classrooms. That is, they use mother tongue, Kiswahili and at times codeswitching (Kembo-Sure & Ogechi 2006b).

As these youth mature into high school and college/university students, a complex identity negotiation develops. In the tertiary institutions, where language drilling is relaxed, the youth appear to use English ('they-code') only for formal interactions in lecture rooms and with college officers. Otherwise, informal issues are transacted in 'we-codes' of codeswitching and Sheng. The latter is used in most informal interactions for building solidarity (Githiora 2002). Note the following Ekegusii-Kiswahili-English codeswitching interaction among university students:

Setting: Two women, Caro, a university student and Emi, a former university student, are talking about the university admission of mature students in Kenya.

3.

- Emi [Imagine our time we never used] [to have mature entrants.]
 Caro Ai!
 Emi [Never!] [They started coming which years?] [In fact our year is when] [there was one one.] [You know, like that time...]
 Caro [You maliza-ed when?]
 finish-PST When did you finish?’

 Emi [Ninety six.]
 Caro [Ninety six.]
 Emi [After that Kales started.]
 Kalenjins ‘Kalenjins started (joining university).’

 [***Ba-ich-ire.***]
 3PL-full-PRF ‘They are many.’

 Caro [***Ba-ich-ire.***]
 3PL-full-PRF ‘They are many.’
 Emi [In fact abaange] [***kwanza*** education they are many.]
 [You find them in a group] [you can’t know if they are students.]
 (Ogechi 2002: 101-102)

Notice that the interlocutors here are native speakers of Ekegusii and could easily identify with Ekegusii. However, in this conversation, they opt for codeswitching as the ‘we-code’. If they found themselves in a multi-ethnic setting, they could either opt for Kiswahili-English codeswitching, Kiswahili-English-Sheng codeswitching or just use Sheng. The three code choices are crucial in building a neutral identity.

When the youth become workers, another brand of trichotomous identity sets in. Here, it is noted that although English and Kiswahili are the official and therefore ‘we-codes’ in Kenya, their being ‘we-codes’ depends on the context of situation. As Myers-Scotton (1993) and Ogechi (2002) note, it is possible to transact official business among public officers and even between a public officer and a service seeker in a vernacular as a ‘we-code’ if the parties concerned share a mother tongue. In this case, Kiswahili and English are the ‘they-codes’ and not languages for negotiating and projecting an identity of intimacy. However, the choice of a ‘code-in-between’ is witnessed both at work and especially during breaks (i.e. lunch break) when the youth use

Kiswahili-English or Kiswahili-English-Sheng codeswitching. This builds bridges and assists to neutralize polarisation. The building of inter-ethnic bridges is further strengthened when Sheng is used at the eateries.

Code Choice and Identity Negotiation at Places of Leisure

Places of leisure here refer to gymnasia, sports stadia and even clubs or disco halls. These are places the youth retire to after work or on weekends. It cannot be gainsaid that meetings at leisure places are the basis for intra- and inter-ethnic bonding. It has been noted that intra-ethnic youth conversation in these places may be conducted in the mother tongue as a ‘we-code’, to emphasize ethnic identity if the participants share a mother tongue and they have the ability to speak it. However, just like in other inter-ethnic interactions, the vernaculars are deemed ‘they-codes’ that create social distance. The ‘codes-in-between’ are English, Kiswahili, codeswitching and Sheng. English is particularly used among the elite youth. Otherwise, Kiswahili, codeswitching and Sheng are the most neutral. Codeswitching is particularly handy as an exploratory choice when the participants meet for the first time. Nevertheless, the choice of Sheng has proved to be most crucial for building bridges in Kenya. Sheng has been used not only in conversations but also in advertisements and music. The following is a commercial advertisement for HIV/AIDS prevention that is accompanied by rap music:

4. Context: On the need to use a condom

DJ Pinyee ana yake. Jee una yako?

Pinyee, the DJ, has his (condom). Do you have yours?

This advertisement is for people of all ages but it strongly captures the youth’s attention due to the background rap music. The manufacturers of condoms and those engaged in HIV and AIDS campaigns know that they can reach the youth if they identify themselves with the youth through the youth culture (the language and rap music). That is why the adverts employ them.

Programmes in most FM radio stations and television stations targeting the youth play rap music. Indeed most of the clubs that the youth frequent play the music authored by fellow youthful rappers. These rappers are culture brokers of the cosmopolitan (‘they-code’), metropolitan (‘code-in-between’) and local identities (‘we-code’) who are highly admired by the youth. Sampers (2004: 38) notes:

...as culture brokers, Kenyan rappers stand between a cosmopolitan, global identity

and a traditional, local identity. As rappers see it, one of their responsibilities is to include tradition and ethnicity in the construction of a modern Kenyan identity. Through the use of vernaculars, several rap musicians such as GidiGidi MajiMaji, Poxi Presha, and Darlin' P, attempt to negotiate a place for ethnicity and ethnic identity within urban youth culture.

Thus some rappers rap in vernaculars besides including codeswitching and Sheng. Indeed majority of them rap in codeswitching and Sheng. In addition to entertaining and helping build inter-ethnic bridges, the music is crucial in HIV / AIDS campaigns. The youthful singers are aware to the fact that once the bridges are built and there is intimacy through the 'we-code', there is a danger of going overboard and contracting HIV / AIDS. Thus they also candidly talk about the pandemic as do the Longombas in their lyric, *Vuta Pumzi*:

5.

Song

Hiha vuta pumzi

Wee vuta pumzi

Longombas wanafanya mambo

Hiha vuta pumzi

Longombas wanatetemsha

Avu..avu.. avuta pumzi

Jamani nisikilizeni eee

Msikilize aaah x2

Kuna wanawake warembo

Wenye marasa na mapaja

Na wazuri kunyuma.

Jamani nisikilizeni eeeh

Msikilize yeeeye.

Kuna wanaume wengi

wenye vifua, warefu, wenye nguvu

na ni wazuri kinyama.

Lakini tujichunge

Pengine wanayo mdudu.

Wana

wana wanatuacha.

Wana

Wana wanayo.

Hiha vuta pumzi.

We vuta pumzi.

Translation

Hi ha breathe in

wee breath in

Longombas are doing things

Hi ha breathe in

Longombas are shaking (things)

bre... bre.. breathe in

Society, listen to me

Listen aaah x2

There exist beautiful women

With buttocks and thighs

And beautiful behind.

Society, listen to me ee

Listen yeeeye.

There exist many men

with wide chests, tall, strong

And good looking like beasts.

But let us take care

perhaps they have a virus.

They are

they are leaving us.

They have

They have it.

Hi ha breathe in.

Hi ha breathe in.

Refrain

Usimwone amejaa nyuma

Ukadhani ako poa.

Usione amerembeka

Ukadhani umefika.

Usimwone ana pesa

Ukadhani umefika.

Pengine anatuacha kesho anachora x2

When you see her with a full "behind"
don't imagine she is fine.

When you see her beautiful
don't imagine that you have arrived.

When you see him with money
Don't imagine that you have arrived.

Perhaps s/he is leaving us x2

Na kama mnayo

Si mwisho wa maisha

Ni ugonjwa tu kama malaria -

Meza dawa, piga tizi, kula vizuri

Utaishi fiti.

Maisha utayasukuma eehe aaah.

Na mjinga usiyejua kujichunga

Kila shimo unaona unadunga

Hebu jichunge kijana

Utakuja kufa tukuzike Lang'ata.

And if you have it
it is not the end of life.

It is disease like malaria -
take medicine, play, eat well
you will live normally.

You will push on with life eehe aaah
And the fool who does not know how to take care
you prick every hole you see
take care young man
You will die, we bury you at Lang'ata.

Pia usione tu, huyo ashainua.

Kifua kisipite tu, huyo ashajigonga.

Tako lisipite tu, huyo ashainua x2

Wee vuta pumzi, avuta pumzi.

Again, you look and you just lift (erect).

No chest passes without you tripping.

No buttock passes by, you just lift (erect) x2

Wee breathe, breathe.

The lyric is quite captivating and entertaining. The code is not only nice but it also captures the youth's attention. However, the song is also loaded with messages on health. It talks about the female features that excite men (beauty, buttocks, thighs) and male features that women admire (tall, strong, built chest). But it warns against being mesmerized by them since people with such features could be people living with HIV. (But let us take care perhaps they have a virus – stanza 2). They could be slowly dying (They are leaving us. They have it – stanza 2). The song also advises that in case one is infected, s/he should not panic but s/he could live normally by having medication, a good diet and doing exercises (And if you have it, it is not the end of life. Take medicine, play, eat well – stanza 3). The song is hard on those men who are reckless and indiscriminate sex maniacs (And the fool who does not know how to take care, you poke every hole you see – stanza 3). The aftermath of such is death (You will die, we bury you at Lang'ata – stanza 3). In a way, what the lyrics in a 'we-code' are trying to convey is that we need to be people united not just as one cohesive nation but also in the fight against HIV/AIDS

that could exterminate us.

Conclusion

The present paper set out to argue a case for trichotomous youth identity as a precursor for building bridges for national identity in Kenya. I have shown that the various codes used in Kenya signal a certain identity. It has also been shown that in multilingual and multicultural Kenya, the youth, have competence in at least three codes. Whenever they choose any of these codes, they signal an identity that is associated with that code. With illustrations from three language use situations, I have shown that the language use patterns display ‘we-code’, ‘they-code’ and ‘code-in-between’ choices. It has been demonstrated that whether consciously or unconsciously, these trichotomous identities enhance Kenya’s multicultural heritage. However, above all else, the ‘we-code’ and the ‘code-in-between’ patterns are crucial in building the much-needed inter-ethnic bridges for national cohesion. On the one hand, the ‘we-code’ especially through Sheng bond the Kenyan youth, who speak and listen to music in it, together as a nation regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. On the other hand, the ‘code-in-between’ through the national and official languages plus codeswitching binds them to and with the elderly population.

Abbreviations used

ASS	associative
CKI	Central Province Initiative
CL	noun class
FUT	future tense
PL	plural
PRF	perfective aspect
PST	past tense

Notes

- 1 A youth is a person who is neither an adult nor a child, but is somewhere in between. The age in which a person is considered a “youth” and thus eligible for special treatment under the law and throughout society varies around the world. Commonly, a youth is somewhere between age 13 and 25.
- 2 [[Ni-ta-pata marks nyingi] [na tena za juu zaidi]]

1S-FUT-get marks many and again of top most
 'I shall score very high marks' (Ogechi 2002: 100)

- 3 In some instances, children adopt the mother's or father's first language as the language of home. However, in an urban setting, they are most likely to speak Kiswahili or English (the latter if they live in a rich neighbourhood)
- 4 A mixed ethnic group settlement near Nakuru town in the Rift Valley. Its inhabitants include communities such as the Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Gusii, Luhya etc. Since 1992, it occasionally experiences inter-ethnic clashes.

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PART THREE

Electronic Media

Reading FM Radio Stations in Kenya: Opening a Pandora's Box

Christopher Odhiambo Joseph

Locus of FM radio Station in mass media

According to Debra Spitulnik (1993:293), it is only recently that anthropologists have struggled to define what falls within the legitimate realm of the study of a “culture” and within the privileged purview of a “discipline.” This has in turn generated a dramatic interest in the study of mass media. This observation for me is extremely important indeed because a la Spitulnik’s concern with mass media, its emergent sub genre in Kenya, the FM radio has not received much intellectual and critical research attention. FM radio stations are in fact a very recent phenomenon in Kenya, as we will see later. However the FM radio stations have participated quiet voraciously in the processes of cultural production and consumption. Admittedly, FM radio stations have contributed generously in the constructions of narratives of subcultures and sub nationalisms, which are largely dialectically opposed to the master narratives of cultural hegemony as well as those of nation-formation and nationalism. Before I go more deeply into the processes and strategies that FM radio stations deploy in agency of inversions and subversions of cultural and nation-formation master narratives, it is important to locate the agency of FM radio stations within the very locus of mass media. This will be done by taking the liberty to quote extensively the definition of mass media by Spitulnik (1993:293).

Mass media –defined in conventional sense as the electronic media of radio, television, film and recorded music, and the print media of newspapers, magazines and popular literature_ are at once artefacts, experiences, practices, and processes. They are economically and politically driven, linked to the developments in science and technology, and like most domains of human life, their existence is extricably bound up with the use of language. Given these various modalities and spheres of operation, there are numerous angles for approaching mass media anthropologically:

as institutions, as work place, as communicative practices, as cultural products, as social activities, aesthetic forms, and as historical development.

This broad definition of mass media is quintessential to my “readings’ and interrogations of programme presentations by FM radio stations even if my approach is not anthropologically oriented. This definition in many ways is profoundly fundamental to my interpretive enterprise because for me the interventions, inversions and subversion agency of FM radio programmes are multiple functions of culture, politics, economics, aesthetic form, social activities and historical developments. Of significance to my argument are the various ways in which a reading and analysis of programmes offered within the specificities of FM radio stations embrace our engagement with issues of identity, politics, culture, language and perhaps our conception of modernity or the lack of it.

Thus our consciously critical contact with FM radio programmes for instance provoke inquiries such as how do FM radio programmes represent and influence or maybe even determine cultural values within our society? For example how do these stations grapple with cultural issues that are ordinarily treated as taboo? Take the case of presenters on a breakfast show, which are very popular with callers, openly discussing gayism, or justifying sex outside marriage or even publicly engaging on discourses of male’s sexual organs. Or even more shocking, the public revelation of a prospective son-in-law who is stressed by a prospective mother-in-law who wants him to sire a child with her before she assents to the marriage of her daughter to the young man. And what about young women who proclaim through a public conversation with the presenters that they would like to have affairs with white men because African men are not “good” enough? Indeed this reading of the FM radio stations as texts open a Pandora’s box eliciting even more disturbing but crucial questions regarding the role of FM radio stations in construction and formulations of social relations and identities? How do they affect our sense of morality, of space and time? What are their functions and role in imagining senses of communities, cultures and subcultures, nationalism and sub nationalism (ethnic consciousness), “localization” as well as in altering and shaping perceptions of socio economic and political transformations?

Given the rather wide template that these issues occupy, this chapter will be quite modest in its quest and will largely engage with the more mundane agency of intervention, inversion and subversion as manifested in

the programmes of these radio stations.

FM Radio stations in Kenya: Historicity

For decades the only radio station in Kenya was V.O.K, inherited from the colonial government and later renamed K.B.C. (Kenya Broadcasting Corporation). K.B.C. enjoyed a monopoly of the airwaves for many years and at the same time acted as the mouth -piece of the government of the day. As the government of the day enjoyed the monopoly of political power so KBC enjoyed the monopoly of airwave communication. However, with the democratisation wind that swept across the world in the 1990s, the government opened up space for political pluralism. Section 2A of the constitution was amended, and in the process KBC also lost its monopoly. This marked the entry of the FM radio stations into the Kenyan airwaves. The emergence of these FM radio stations completely shifted the paradigms of radio broadcasting and presentation. While KBC emphasised “correctness” of language use by the broadcasters, that is, the use of the (RP) Received Pronunciation, the FM radio stations completely demystified and in fact subverted this notion of correctness. Whereas KBC had very clear structures of programmes where serious and non-serious were distinctly defined, the FM radio stations synchronized entertainment and education and in the process the dichotomy between the two not only became fluid but indeed superfluous.

The central concern of this chapter as mentioned above is essentially to demonstrate how this subversion of correctness has enabled the FM radio stations to capture the imagination of the Kenyan masses and in the process become a site of social, political, cultural and even economic intervention. As such, in this article, playing betwixt and between edutainment is privileged as a trope for the field of play for intervention, inversion, subversion and dialogic interaction where some FM radio stations in Kenya have situated themselves within the emerging democratic culture. As such this trope becomes a significant site of playing with possibilities in a dialogic motion to open up boundaries of multiple communications as well as democratic spaces and avenues. In a way, the dynamics of FM radio stations’ broadcasting consciously attempts to deconstruct frames of radio programmes and presentations especially as structured, constituted and interpreted by the post-colonial monolithic and authoritarian African leaderships. May be this can be understood more deeply by engaging with the interpretation and understanding of the functions and roles of radio in post-colonial Africa by a

fictional character symbolizing traditional wisdom and leadership in one of Wole Soyinka's political satirical dramas – *Kongi's Harvest*. In this play, the traditional ruler Oba Danlola, who has since been deprived of his political powers by the autocratic leader – Kongi – makes very cynical comments about the role of the state owned radio station. A comment, which in many ways correspond with the state of affairs in Kenya before the airwaves were finally opened up for operation of FM radio stations. He comments that:

They say oh how
They say it all on *silent skull*
But who cares? Who but a lunatic
will bandy words with boxes
with government rediffusion sets
which talk and talk and never
take a lone word in reply.
I cannot counter words, oh
I cannot counter words of
a rediffusion set
my ears are sore
but my mouth is agbayon
for I do not bandy words
no *I do not bandy words*
with a government loudspeaker. (Emphasis mine. *Kongi's Harvest* pp1-2)

Oba Danlola's interpretation and understanding of the function and role of state-owned radio reveals to a large extent the traditional idea of radio broadcasting as characterised by "monologization" of communication channels where masses are supposed to faithfully accept what the radio says without asking any questions. They are just passive recipients who must not question anything. In the process the radio becomes an agent, promoting a culture of silence among the listeners. Indeed Oba Danlola's interpretation and understanding of the traditional role of the radio which "says it all on silent skulls" resonates quiet closely to Paulo Freire's reactions to traditional methods of pedagogy which he describes aptly as the "Banking concept of education."¹ This approach to education for Freire, promotes a "mono-channelled" flow of information and knowledge that assumes that the mind of recipient of knowledge is a *tabula rasa* (an empty vessel) that waits to be filled up with external knowledge by an omniscient teacher.

In Kenya, I see the FM radio stations not only debunking the myth of broadcasting as a “government loudspeaker” but moreover undermining the master cultural narratives and even the sense of Nationalism. Maybe the question that needs to be answered at this juncture is _ how do these FM radio stations radically depart from the traditional broadcasting and presentation strategies?

Re-inventing radio broadcasting: Interventions and subversions

Traditionally, radio broadcasting privileged a monologic channel of communication. However, with the emergence of FM radio stations, especially within the Kenyan context, this has changed radically. FM radio stations apparent(ly) quest for dialogic play sites where the radio presenters persistently strive to project themselves outside the strictures of the rediffusion set and plunge directly into the spheres of actual existence of their listeners. In this way the FM radio presenters, in fact, dismantle the myth of the radio presenter as all knowing individuals. Furthermore, the FM radio presenters seems to be intent on demystifying the very long held myth of the radio presenter as a “god” in a box, invisible, mysterious and all knowing, both omnipresent and omniscient, whose voice could never be questioned. To this end, the FM radio presenters have fashioned out various strategies to break out of the “box”. This attempt to break out of the “box” is meant to enable them make broadcasting (a) dialogic, a site of possibilities and opportunities for competing ideas and knowledge. These experimental strategies are what for me constitute intervention. To reformulate Zakes Mda,² intervention happens when the presenter invites listeners to participate in the deeper analysis, interpretation and reflection on news items. Intervention, fundamentally, is meant to conscientize the general public, to make them reflect on and have new insights into the issues that affect their day to day living and at the same time find solutions to the problems facing them. It is in this regard that the strategies of intervention and conscientization deployed by the FM radio stations gesture towards Paulo Freire’s idea in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In his book, Freire expresses his discontentment with the traditional methods of pedagogy that he refers to as banking concept of education and counterpoints towards a dialogic and more participatory approach, which he refers to as problem posing pedagogy. Drawing analogy between the problem posing pedagogy and the strategies of FM radio stations’ intervention one discerns a plethora of similarities. For instance, in problem – posing pedagogy a code/

codification which can be narrative, play or radio news item is used as catalyst to enable the community of participants to interpret and analyse conditions and situations which militate against their progress and development. Here the teacher and the community of learners become collaborators in the research and learning process and none of them is construed as having monopoly of knowledge. The same is true of the way that a number of programmes in FM radio stations involve the listeners to help in analysing and interpreting certain news items and issues that are fundamental to the general public. It is interesting to note that in these programmes the presenters act as catalysts and not as custodians of knowledge and information. But how have the FM radio stations managed to do this by marring entertainment and education?

The “Joker”³ in FM radio stations

The most radical and innovative aspect of FM radio stations broadcasting in Kenya, for me, is the introduction of the “Joker” concept. The most significant dimension is not just the outrageous presence of the “Joker” but more so his role as a social provocateur. The FM radio stations use the joker to mediate between the official presenter and the general listening public. As a buffoon, the joker is capable of playing betwixt and between the serious and the trivial. He knows how to reinforce power and also how to subvert it. It is in this sense that he plays the role of the interventionist. According to Augusto Boal who introduced the concept of a “joker” in interventionist theatre, “a “joker” is a contemporary and neighbour of the spectator. What this means for the radio is that the joker as a “persona” is closer to the listening public than the official radio presenter. Because he is inspired by the urban comedy, especially one that portrays the follies and antics of the “double villager,” most listeners who are ordinary people easily identify with him and tend to agree and accept his analysis, interpretation and perspective of the issues presented for discussion. More so the joker has a joking relationship with the serious co-presenter and, by consistently provoking and teasing his co-presenter, he makes the audience see the presenters in a new light, not as a god in box but as fellow human being whose knowledge and understanding of issues can in fact be questioned and challenged.

But what major roles do these “jokers” play about culture and politics in contemporary Kenyan setting? Examples of “joker” concept from two FM radio stations will suffice. Our illustrations come from Kiss 100 FM and Easy

FM. Kiss 100 FM has a morning programme that runs from five o'clock dubbed the 'Big Breakfast show' presented by Caroline Mutoko and Nyambane alias Baby J Nyambs. From my interpretation, the two presenters come out as 'performers' playing two diametrically opposed roles in a well-rehearsed theatrical performance. Significantly, one of the presenters, Caroline Mutoko, plays her "real" role as official radio presenter. She does not dissolve her personality into a fictional character or role. She does not aspire to fictionalize at all. So in her performance she maintains or strives to maintain the more serious posture of a radio presenter. So, throughout the programme she maintains her actual official position as a respected radio presenter. Baby J. Nyambs on the other hand, right from the outset, is playing a role, a fictitious character. He hardly ever uses his real name: Walter Mongare.

Therefore when we meet him he is already a "joker", an actor and therefore he expects us to believe that he is just joking, playing and should not be taken seriously. He, therefore, has the 'poetic license' to make whatever comments he wants to make without fear of retribution. Baby J. Nyambs makes rubbish of the etiquettes and decorum, of the "correctness" of radio broadcasting and presentation. He uses a prominently pronounced ethnic accent from his Gusii community and with abandon humorously exploits the stereotypes associated with his ethnic community's modes of behaviour. It is important to note that the use of ethnic accent and its attendant stereotypes has always achieved great acceptance amongst Kenyans when used in radio and television comedies. Baby J. Nyambs persona, as a "double villager," makes him to immediately strike a cord of commonality value with majority of the Kenyan radio listeners. Of importance here is how he (Baby J. Nyambs) creates possibilities for social, cultural and political interventions.

Baby J. Nyambs and Mutoko present an interactive talk show that goes by the title – "The Big issue of the day" that comes immediately after the seven o'clock news. The big issue of the day is usually a debate on the burning news issue arising out of the news bulletin or from the lead story in one of the leading local dailies. The structure of the debate is usually predictable.

The two presenters will obviously occupy opposing positions on the issue. One becomes the antagonist and the other protagonist. More often than not, the Joker, Nyambs, will take a rather ridiculous if not outrageous position while Mutoko will take what appears to be the more rational and reasonable stand; what on the surface appears to be the more rational position. Initially,

the two will engage in a heated debate about the issue and predictably fail to reach a consensus or compromise. It is at this point that they will invite the general public to call in and participate in the debate or help them solve the conflict. The two will then relegate themselves to the position of discussion moderators. At this moment the radio station becomes a field of dialogic play where members of the public freely discuss the issue at hand without any inhibitions. The programme, in a way, takes the form of Boal's forum theatre where the listeners become "listeners – actors" and not just passive recipients of information. The public interrogates and analyses the news items and in the end are expected to have gained new insights into the issue. This kind of intervention makes the listeners to become socially and politically conscious of the issues happening around them. It is in this sense, akin to Freire's problem posing pedagogy, that the listeners and radio presenters become co-researchers, co-investigators and co-learners. For me, this forum conscientizes the listeners, because in the process they cease to be like Oba Danlola's 'silent skulls'. A point to note, however, is that the joker, Baby J. Nyambs, takes advantage of his role as a joker to say things that he would not say if he was not playing this fictionalized role. Agreeably, this fictional role enables him to be both "abusive" and provocative.

As a collaborative interventionist venture intended to lead to a high level of conscientization, Mutoko and Baby J. Nyambs never provide answers to the question but let the listeners decide which side of the debate they support.

Easy FM also has its own morning show programme that is intended to be interventionist and also uses the joker concept. Here once again, one finds two presenters: Bernard Otieno who is the official host of the programme and is always in his official role and Maurice Ochieng aka 'Mudomo Baggy' who is always playing a role. The two run "The Breakfast show" and play more or less the same roles as Mutoko and Baby J. Nyambs in the Kiss 100 FM programme. Bernard Otieno, the host, plays within the rules of correctness whereas Mudomo Baggy, once again like Nyambane, subverts all the etiquettes and decorum of radio broadcasting, especially the language. Unlike in Kiss FM show where the two presenters are co-hosts, in the Easy FM show only one presenter, that is Bernard Otieno is in the studio. The joker, Mudomo Baggy, is always an "outsider", often on the streets. Like Baby J. Nyambs he too relies heavily on ethnic accent and stereotypes. Though he is a Luo, he dissolves into the persona of a Kikuyu as revealed by his ethnic accents and its related stereotypes. Given that right from the outset Mudomo Baggy is

always outside the rediffusion set, somewhere on the streets, one would assume that he is supposed to act as a kind of mediator between Otieno and the general public. Like Baby J. Nyambs, Mudomo Baggy is also an actor and a stand-up comedian. Because Mudomo Baggy dissolves his personality into one of a “double villager” he resonates quite well with the common man on the street, pretending to be unsophisticated, simple and naïve. In this programme, Otieno and Mudomo Baggy (un) consciously seem to employ one of Augusto Boal’s forms of theatre commonly known as invisible or ambush theatre which consists of the presentation of a scene in an environment other than the theatre, before people who are not spectators. The place can be a restaurant, a side walk, a market, a train, a line of people etc. The people who witness the scene are those who are there by chance. During the spectacle these people must not have the slightest idea that it is a “spectacle” for this would make them spectators.

In the Easy FM performance the studio presenter, that is Otieno, raises an issue that he thinks is of great concern to the general public, and like in the case of Kiss 100 FM, this is usually one of the main news items in the local dailies. After raising the issue Otieno usually calls Mudomo Baggy to find out his opinion about it. In a characteristically predicable manner Mudomo Baggy takes the position contrary to Otieno’s. And in this way they create a conflict. To solve the conflict Otieno asks Mudomo Baggy to go to the streets and ask the common man and woman their opinion on the issue. The conversation between the people on the streets and Mudomo Baggy is then carried live on air. However the people whom Mudomo Baggy is talking to on the streets are not listening to the programme on air at that particular time and might not even be aware that they are on air. Furthermore, they are ignorant of the fact that a debate has been going on between Otieno and Mudomo Baggy. As such their comments and opinions usually tend to be more spontaneous, objective and sober. In a way, they add new dimensions to the official news item and as such expand the knowledge of listeners.

The dialogic programmes offered by FM radio stations therefore intervene directly as they involve the participation of common man and woman who express their views about issues that affect them openly. This process in itself is both a subversion and inversion of the traditional role of the radio especially in situations where the radio broadcasting stations were used as tools of propaganda by the ruling parties as was in the case of Kenya during

the KANU autocratic regime.

The peoples' Parliament: the culture of conscientization

Before the general elections of 2002 in Kenya Kiss FM radio station came up with a programme called the Peoples' Parliament where the host of the programme, Jimmi Gathu, doubled up as the speaker. The important aspect of this programme was in the manner that the participants dissolved themselves into roles. As I have already mentioned the host took the role of the speaker and guided the debate. The callers also took roles and referred to themselves as honourable members. They then debated with a lot of passion the motion – that is – the burning question that had been tabled by the speaker. This programme became a site for the many marginalized voices to articulate their sentiments on how the country had been governed and their vision for the future. The programme indeed enabled the common man to articulate political subjects that were previously considered taboo. For once, the common man could call in and ridicule the then ruling party KANU and its Chairman. The programme in many ways became an alternative site to the chief's baraza. In many ways, the programme dismantled the hierarchical structures of power as the politicians had to compete with the ordinary mwananchi to air their views. More importantly the politicians' views and opinions were interrogated without fear of intimidation. Thus, the common mwananchi was elevated to a higher level in the creation, analysis and interpretation of information and ideas. To echo Boal, the Kenyan masses became active – participants or spec-actors in the performance of political discourse and power.

The newly elevated status of the listeners as speakers translated them into producers of information and knowledge, no longer the passive consumers. And this certainly dealt a severe blow to the culture of silence that had characterised the Kenyan masses for decades under the repressive KANU regime. This kind of programme has since been replicated in many other FM radio stations with varying degrees of success.

English marked ethnic accents: Identity- formation or stereotypes?

Do the English marked ethnic accents now in vogue in the urban elite targeted audiences play a role much greater than mere entertainment and elicitation of humour and laughter? The thesis of this section of the paper is that interpreted within the broad paradigms of post-colonial and construction of ethnic discourses, these ethnic marked English accents do in a sense participate in a project of identity re-formulation as well as in the politics of languages re-positioning.

Listening to these English marked ethnic accents on the FM radio stations several questions arise. For instance, why do the FM radio stations that are apparently meant for a well educated elite listening audience privilege employment of such accents in their mainstream programmes? Secondly, these stations seem to have very explicit policies about the use of vernacular languages to the extent that they never play any music in ethnic languages. It is these paradoxical and sometimes contradictory practices (of these FM radio stations) that makes it interesting to interrogate what these accents might mean when read and interpreted within the larger and general politics and discourses of ethnic construction. So we ask, are these ethnic marked accents in a way intended to assert a difference from a particular hegemonic centre or are they simply meant to amuse the listeners? For instance, Baby J. Nyambs who in reality is a Kisii uses the Abagusii accent in his presentation for Kiss 100 FM while Mudomo Baggy, a Luo uses the Gikuyu accent in his presentations for Easy FM. This in itself raises a lot of questions especially about ethnic stereotyping. However this section argues that there is a sense in which the use of these ethnic marked accents participates in the larger debate of post-colonial discourses and the quest for 'otherness'. This actually has to do with the question of language, place and identity. The history of the Kenyan elites is indeed one of translocations, specifically of language, place and identity. There is a sense in which the generation of elites in Kenya as is the case in other post-colonial spaces is one of alienation and displacement. Many of the elites in Kenya tend to aspire to the culture of the former colonizer and this may explain the recipe of programmes offered by the urban FM radio stations. This is, however, a disturbing question that arises out of the deployment of the ethnic marked accents by these urban radio stations. Echoing Fredric Jameson's idea of the political unconscious, is this not part of our ethnic unconscious? Are these FM radio stations in a sense taking advantage

of the elites' ethnic unconscious? It seems that these presenters are involved in a project of persistently reminding the elites of their often-peripheralized and muted hybridity, duality and double consciousness. The traces of ethnic accents are sharp reminders of ethnic memories that are often pushed into the subconsciousness by the educated elites.

However, the use of these accents also brings into focus the debates of nation and ethnicity. These accents seem to gesture towards the fact that the nation is a sum total of ethnic identities. In this play of ethnic accents the whole idea of the post-colonial nation as an imagined construct are not only confirmed but also affirmed.

More than this, the ethnic marked accents raise a lot of questions about those who have settled in the City, and their relationship with ethnic backgrounds and identities. For instance, we have people who have freely settled in the City and are well educated and free to use standard English language showing clear signs of alienation. They seek an alternative differentiated identity as represented by elitist FM radio presenters who exhibit hybridised identities and who in a sense act as metonym of the entire elite society found in urban spaces. As such those accents reveal the nature of the city/urban space as a site of displacement and alienation. The city/urban space in many ways alienates the urban settler who is seen to have "originally" migrated from the countryside, which is also the metaphor of ethnic identity. The cosmopolitan character of the city forces the settler to embrace a new language other than that of his ethnic origin. Indeed, to belong to the city, the settler vehemently struggles to suppress any traces of his ethnic identity by aspiring to speak the language of the City, which is presented as the language of the nation. The accent marked English of the FM radio presenters becomes important in the politics of post-coloniality as they persistently remind the "city settler" of his/her dual identity which s/he always attempts to suppress.

Through the use of these ethnic marked English accents it is correct to say that the FM radio stations (un) consciously participate in the project of intervening in the alienation of ethnic identities. However, this project should not be perceived in the parochial sense of ethnic chauvinism but as a form of establishing "Otherness" and "differentiation" from the dominating language of the city, which in fact is an extension of the colonial heritage. This employment of ethnic marked English accent as a strategy of self-definition

and affirmation reflects Raja Rao's thinking as interpreted and record by Tiffin et-al (1986:39) that:

Appropriation is the process by which the language is taken and made to bear the burden of one's own Cultural experiences or as Raja Rao puts it; to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own.

This appropriation of the English language through ethnic marked accents may most probably explain the popularity of the presenters who use such accents. The ethnic accent, the sometimes untranslated words, the sounds and the textures of the language can be deemed to have the power and pressure of the general culture they signify – they thus become metaphoric in their inference of identity and totality. It is actually in this sense then that the ethnic marked English accents deployed by the FM radio stations presenters become more than avenues of entertainment into whole projects of cultural and identity signification.

Consciousness or Community service?

Not all interventions projected by the FM radio stations empower and conscientize the listeners. There are some that can easily be seen as very temporary. These are interventions to do with providing information to the general public about the state of traffic flow on the major roads in the City Centre and more importantly the efforts by the FM radio station hosts to call the relevant authorities and ask them to help ease congestion on the roads.

However in the quest to intervene in about all spheres of life the FM radio station presenters sometimes trivialise issues. When they take it upon themselves, for instance, to mediate between lovers whose relationships are on the verge of collapse or those that have actually collapsed while revealing very little knowledge of marriage counselling skills. In such instances there is indeed some form of intervention but in the real sense of the word no consciousness is developed as the intervention is only in the form of thawing tensions and numbing nervous conditions between the conflicting parties.

The FM radio stations have also engaged in the more concrete and pragmatic socio-economic interventions. The FM radio stations create awareness about the plight of Kenya masses suffering from famine and drought and even go further to fundraise.

The rise of the subcultures

This brings me to the very sensitive issue of culture and the way the FM radio stations influence culture. A number of programmes that the stations present in many ways privilege urban sub cultures. This ranges from the music, language use and discourses generated and presented to the public by the talk show presenters. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, these radio stations in many ways encourage cultural values which might not be in sync with the master culture of the society. They encourage a culture of economic dependency where people are encouraged to call in and literally beg for certain favors. Take for example people calling in to ask the presenters to ask the public to finance their weddings and holiday trips to mention a few.

But the most disturbing feature of these radio stations is the manner in which they unabatedly accentuate certain foreign cultural values. Admittedly, the stations encourage Euro-American cultures which are not always consistent with the local cultures especially in their utterances. It is a truism that mass media has 'the power' and particular in their roles as transmitters of culture. It has been argued that mass media does provide audiences with ways of seeing and interpreting the world which eventually influence and shape the very way that they participate in their society. This argument is consistent with the role that FM radio programmes, especially the talk shows and music, play in developing urban subcultures which are usually deemed as antagonistic to master culture of the society. In fact the adult culture in Kenya which is actually equated with the master culture has always been in conflict with the cultures produced by FM radio stations. The doyens of the master culture have always complained, for example, that the music played by the FM radio stations which is perhaps influenced by Euro-American cultures tends to promote a culture of liberal sexuality. Songs such as "*We Kamu*" by Nonini and "*Manyake and Jwala*" by Joel and Circuite have been exemplified as songs that explicitly speak about sex and therefore entice the youth to engage in pre-marital sexual adventures.

But more than the music, the discourses that the FM radio presenters engage in their talk shows have also been interpreted as complicit in the promotion of a decadent urban subculture. The presenters through their talks often tend to foreground mannerisms and modes of behaviour that are not consistent with the cultural values of the society. There are, for instance, romance sessions in which callers who are married are encouraged to call and date other married people. There is a more absurd example such as the

discussion as to whether it is important to put on underwear or not. In fact sometimes the whole show degenerates into pornography.

Conclusion

All in all, the FM radio stations in Kenya have played a fundamental and significant role in confronting the culture of silence and in the process enabling and nurturing the democratic space. The dialogic sites situated within the trope of playing betwixt and between edutainment have made it possible for the FM radio stations to intervene on issues and matters that are of great concern to the general public. Though FM radio stations have been criticised for subverting the very good principles of broadcasting, their employment of concepts such as the “joker” should be appreciated within the larger context of wittingly establishing structures and cultures that can support interventionist strategies, conscientization and a democratic culture. It is therefore obvious that even though these stations have glaring anomalies in terms of broadcasting ethics, they do participate in cultural production, social processes and in the wider issues of race, gender, and ethnicity as well as politics of the nation- state.

Notes

- 1 See Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for more detailed discussion.
- 2 In *When People Play People*.
- 3 The ‘joker’ is a concept that Augusto Boal introduced in his theatre work to bridge the gap between the audience and the actors. The concept of the joker is not novel to Boal as it has been used variously e.g. the fool in Shakespearean drama, the half demented minstrel - Jadum in Okigbo’s ‘Heavens gate’. See Boal’s *Theater of the Oppressed* for incisive description of the ‘joker’ concept.

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PART FOUR

Art and Space

The Story of the Godown Arts Centre: A Journey to Freedom through the Arts

Joy Mboya

While it is too soon to properly locate the GoDown Arts Centre within a cultural/historical framework, the centre has, nevertheless, in its brief existence from concept to reality over the last four years had several salient experiences along the way, which foretell its potential and influence not only in Kenya, but in the Eastern Africa region generally. It could well emerge as one of the precious spaces in our society where freedom of expression is secured.

Beginnings

A number of factors made the GoDown possible. Foremost among these was the pioneering resolve of the individuals who comprised the Founding Group of the GoDown. This Group strongly felt that the time had come for Kenyans to take charge of their cultural agenda by establishing and managing their own cultural spaces. The idea arose naturally from an examination of existing realities. These realities included firstly, that from the mid-seventies, there was a steady decline of the Kenya National Theatre, a potential anchor of artistic creativity in Kenya. Second was the ongoing absence of a cultural policy framework for the development of arts and culture. Kenyan artists had therefore to rely heavily on resident European Union (EU) centres _ the French Cultural Centre, the Goethe Institute, the Netherlands Embassy, the British Council, etc. for support of their creative endeavours. The EU centres provided physical space for rehearsals and performances, often even financial assistance for the staging of productions and the creation of artistic work. They also enabled the professional development of local artists significantly by facilitating exchanges and collaborations.

Another critical factor making the GoDown possible was the socio-political environment of the nineties, the decade prior to the eventual

establishment of the GoDown. The characteristics of this pivotal time included an expanding critical outlook, initiative-taking and the seeking of new approaches and solutions by Kenyans. This, after over twenty years of the censorship of freedoms and the stifling of democratic space by the political regime. In fact, so stringent had been the censorship measures instituted that during the eighties, Kenya became a *de jure* one-party state: political opposition was illegal. Media editors, writers, and politicians, who tried to provide counter-views to government propaganda were charged with subversion and detained without trial. Creativity went into hibernation. A bleak period in Kenya's post-Independence history set in.

But by the nineties, ordinary Kenyans, long disillusioned by government, began to find alternative survival solutions themselves. In the arts, for example, musicians battled piracy by producing their music independently in home studios and attempting to establish their own distribution networks. Visual artists founded 'collectives' and public exhibitions by local painters and sculptors were steadily on the increase.

Urban music in Kenya, a localized version of rap and hip-hop, took off among the youthful population as their expression of the attempt to vigorously claim 'space' for them-selves. Comedy acts, satirizing politicians and the government, swelled the numbers in local entertainment spots, while the local cartoon sections in the dailies, also lampooning the regime, were read and discussed on the radio and in the bars.

In politics, with international pressure mounted and the suspension of Aid threatened, political opposition parties were once more allowed. Kenya was headed for a change.

In 2000, the Ford Foundation, (already present in the East Africa region since the sixties), set up a portfolio for the development of Media, Arts & Culture in its Eastern Africa office, based in Nairobi. The Foundation encouraged individual artists and arts organizations to propose a model for an arts centre that would serve artists not only in Nairobi and Kenya, but that would also be a link point in the region, networking with Uganda and Tanzania.

So in 2001, the Founding Group of what would eventually become the GoDown, spearheaded a series of meetings and discussions around the establishment of a Kenyan/East African arts centre. These deliberations were to continue for two years before the Centre became a reality. The group

reflected the new characteristics of the changing socio-political mood of Kenya in the mid 90s. It was comprised of:

- Gichora Mwangi (deceased September 2004). Having completed a doctorate in the UK in Theatre Studies in 1996, he returned to Kenya, immediately immersing himself in theatre through teaching and directing. A few years later he would set up a framework for developing new authentic Kenyan playwriting under the organization Karamu Trust.
- Opiyo Okach. After 5 years in the UK studying physical theatre, Opiyo came back home to Nairobi and with two other colleagues, began to explore contemporary dance. He established a training model through which he has introduced the art-form to a new generation of contemporary dancers.
- Joy Mboya. Returning to Nairobi after 4 years in Sydney, Australia where she had completed a post-graduate diploma in Voice Studies, she began a program of training in the performing arts for youth.
- Lengai Croze. An architect, fresh from studies in the UK, joined the group to provide his skills in the thinking-through of the physical lay-out for an arts centre.
- Judy Ogana. She was heading programmes at a visual arts organization, Kuona Trust, that had been formed in the late nineties.
- CHAPS Puppeteers, led by Eric Krystall and Lawi Keboga, although not an arts organization per se, embraced the vision of a multi-disciplinary arts space, and joined the Group with a view to developing puppetry as an art-form.
- Suki Mwendwa. She participated briefly in the initial discussions. She had just completed a Doctorate in the USA on Social Architecture, but was also a dancer since childhood.
- Mumbi Kaigwa & Keith Pearson. A theatre couple who had started their own company in Nairobi called The Theatre Company.
- Philip Coulson. An advocate and partner with a local law firm who gave the project legal guidance pro bono.

- Mario Jullienne. An accounting professional and a member of the Rotary Club of Nairobi. The Rotary Club served as the custodian of the first grant received by the GoDown from the Ford Foundation. (After the Centre became established as an independent legal entity the custodial ties with the Rotary gradually ended. The GoDown now relates directly with all its partners).

These individuals were in the vanguard. As discussions progressed, a few of the original discussants dropped out but new ones, such as Sarakasi Trust and Nairobi Trust, came along. All these artists were ready to see and seize an opportunity successfully. Moreover, they were willing to share and spread that success. Together, through many meetings, over many months, they formulated the concept of the GoDown.

Looking for Models

There was discussion back and forth, in those early meetings, about the type of organizational structures and legal frameworks to be adopted for an African centre. In the end it was agreed that such discussions would remain hypothetical propositions until there was engagement and learning from real spaces, real examples – how had they grown, how were they operating today?

At that time nowhere else in the sub-Sahara region, apart from perhaps South Africa, seemed to have the experience of multi-disciplinary arts spaces. But as contact between South African and East African artists was practically nil at that point (in 2000-1), the Founder group opted to look at arts centre examples in the UK. Joy Mboya went to the UK on behalf of the group.

It was an eye-opening tour. Joy Mboya visited spaces in Glasgow, Cardiff, Bristol, and London, representative of the many varied arts centres. Pieces of advice she received, and some of her observations along the way are recorded in a travel journal she maintained:

In Glasgow, at The Old Fruit Market, where I'd watched a theatre performance-

"Don't over-renovate. Keep the space simple and flexible."

Still in Scotland, at the Ramshorn Theatre, two pieces of advice from the Director – *"Budget for adequate staff from the very start."*

"Don't under-estimate your storage needs."

At Chapter Arts Centre, in Wales, I asked the Director what he would do differently if he had to start again and he replied, “*I would weight trading-to art 2:1.*”.

In London, I visited two spaces that were quite off-putting and aloof in their reception and I made a note that in our centre, we were to ensure “*a policy of accessibility and staff hospitality.*” And a London Director warned, “*Do not fall into the trap of running a building.*”

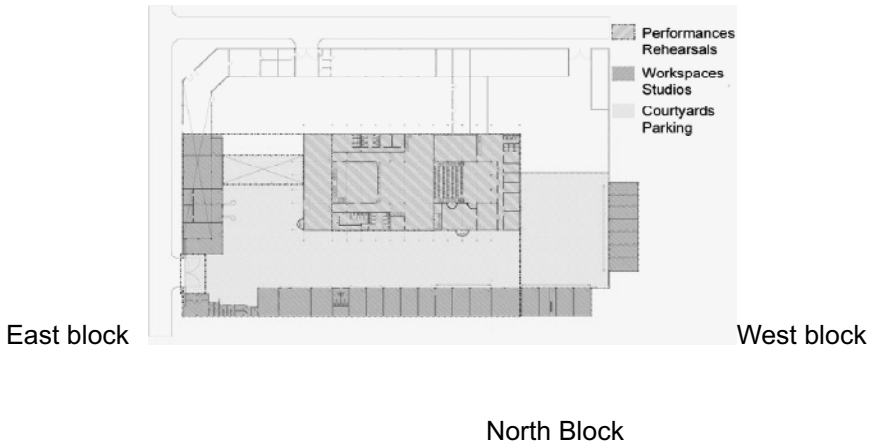
Overall, many useful insights were shared, but no single model was identified as the ‘right fit’ for Kenya. What transpired instead is that the tour enabled a refinement of the Founder group’s original concept based on realities experienced and the local Kenya context. A 2-year Development ‘Test Phase’ for the centre was proposed. This phase would be for hands-on trialing of the various ideas received, to consolidate organizational frameworks, to establish systems for centre management and operations, to try out initial programming for audiences, to plan for financial sustainability, and to look for regional opportunities for networking and collaborating. Joy Mboya became the Development Director of the centre, leading it through this phase.

Having researched some concrete examples of arts centres, the group now sought a physical space in Nairobi, in which to locate their idea of an arts centre. Little did they imagine that finding such a space would be long and complicated. After three false starts – from an old primary school complex, to a disused cinema and empty upper floor in a shopping centre, to a packaging warehouse – finally, a home was found in a former car workshop complex. The chase had taken close to two years.

The building occupied by the GoDown Arts Centre lies on the northern fringes of Nairobi’s main Industrial Area, close to the City Centre and to neighbouring middle-class residential areas.

The property is comprised of three main blocks – east, west and north which lie in a U-shape around a large central godown (warehouse) to the south. The blocks are separated by open yard. In total the area occupied is approximately 6000 sq. metres.

The Godown- Physical Layout



When the site was first occupied by the Centre, the blocks were run-down shell structures that had remained unused for about 2 years. They required substantial renovation and new construction and fittings. This included the erection of new walls, windows, doors and ablutions.

The grant to renovate the premises was provided by the Ford Foundation, and the key areas renovated through the grant were:

North Block

Administration/Work spaces/Studio spaces

The architect's plans converted the derelict former car workshops into a series of standard module spaces measuring approximately 5m x 7m, to be used flexibly as studios, offices or meeting rooms. Each unit was fitted with basic fluorescent lighting and two wall sockets. Glazed windows and doors were fitted in each unit, floor to ceiling, allowing maximum light.

Two views of the North Block:



Before Renovations (Jan 2003)



After Renovations (Jan 2004)

Ablution Area and Gate House

The existing toilets were completely renovated. New bowls and cisterns were installed, and the walls tiled with ceramic tiles. The existing shower and urinal areas were also refurbished and re-tiled.

In addition to the existing ablution block, four new toilets, 2 for men and 2 women, were added towards the centre of the North Block.

Ablutions Gate-house to far right



Before



After

West Block

The West Block was converted into studios for Visual Artists. Each unit has a roof light in addition to the large glazed doors and windows. There are a total of 10 studios, two of which are separated by folding metal doors making them expandable into small exhibition areas, if required. There is also an external work shed for sculpture and welding work.

View down towards West Block



West Block Courtyard



Before

Studios with rooflights



External work shed in open yard



After

East Block

A more specialized conversion of space was carried out in the East Block which comprises:

1. Film Editing Studio and offices
2. Music Studio and offices



The GoDown

The Main Performance Hall and Exhibition space

The first renovation grant was not sufficient to improve this part of the property in any complete way. However, a number of key renovations were carried out, to enable performances and exhibitions to take place at a basic level. In the Exhibition space, the leaking roof and rotted ceiling were repaired. Spotlights were also installed to light exhibitions. In the Main performance

hall, basic house lights were installed. A sprung floor was put in place for dance and other performances, and all existing extraneous walls were demolished leaving the space open and flexible for a variety of possibilities for audience/performance relationship. Interlocking metal tier-frames were also fabricated and installed in the Main Hall to carry seats during performances.

Main Hall: Before

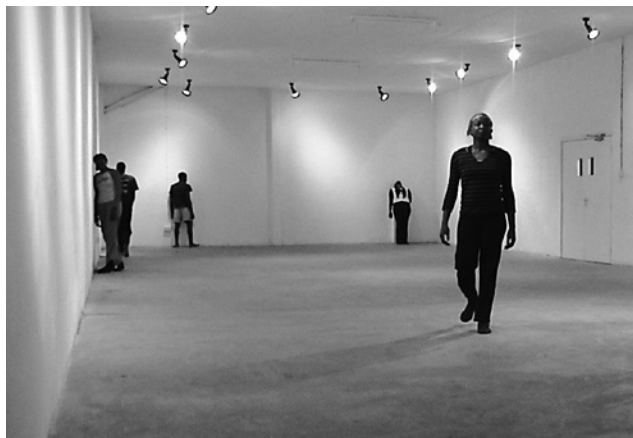


Main Hall: After- with sprung floor and seating tiers



The Main Hall is today entered and exited through the Exhibition gallery, via newly installed doors. It can also be accessed from the northern courtyard through new metal roller shutters. Towards the rear of the main performance area, another door was fitted leading into the back, which is still un-developed. Here, an open studio was created; it also has a sprung timber floor, for acrobatic and dance rehearsals. Future dance studio, black box and changing rooms are planned for the rear area.

The Exhibition Gallery with newly fitted lights



The lower roofs of the entire warehouse were renovated, with new iron roofing sheets replacing the old, leaking, rusted sheets



Before- Godown from the rear



After- Godown rear with Workshop Studio & Roller Shutter access to Main Hall (photo far left)



Thika palm tree and flower-box with bougainvillea

In total the GoDown provides 25 independent spaces that are used by a variety of artist organizations for studios, office spaces, workshops and meeting rooms. The large godown (warehouse) serves as a performance and rehearsal area, and exhibition gallery.

Artists in Residence, Attracting Audiences

After completion of Phase 1 of renovations in September 2004, artist organisations began to settle in at the GoDown. But even before the renovations were complete, acrobats and visual artists were already using the space.

The acrobats descended like a flock of birds, their thirst for a space of their own finally slaked. They came in the hundreds and very soon the industrial neighbourhood of GoDown could not ignore the arrival of this “new kid on the block.” Kiosk-owners across the street from the GoDown, and “matatus”

(public transport mini-vans) plying the route all wondered who the dreadlocked individuals were that trooped daily into the GoDown. Managers from adjacent businesses dropped in to find out the reason for the loud, 'disturbing' drumming and singing that spilled out over the GoDown's walls.

The first visual artists in the space reveled in its raw-ness and were inspired in their work by the re-construction and renovation that was going on around them. A little later, with the administrative spaces and studios complete, more artists and artist organisations became a part of the GoDown. The groups that based themselves at the GoDown from September 2003 included:

Kuona Trust

Studios & training workshops for visual artists

Sarakasi Trust

Training and exposure for acrobatics

Gaara Dance Foundation

Contemporary african choreographic development

Medeva TV

Film/video creative and technical training

Twin Roots

Performing arts as a medium for social awareness and development

RAMOMA

Print workshop, gallery managers

Nairobis Trust

Web design and electronic art opportunities for disadvantaged youth

Kete Bul

Music recording facility

CITD East Africa (CITD)

Center for International Theatre Development

Building contemporary dance and theatre networks in the East Africa region, and between Russia/East Africa.

Phoenix Players

Props and costumary for theatre.

Now, over 3 years later, some of these organizations are ready to move on, they've grown, transformed and need different premises from the GoDown. Hence the GoDown renews its artistic blood through the process of receiving new users, allowing the space to maintain freshness and vigour.

Since its inception, the GoDown has presented many public programs. In the beginning there were, and there still continues to be, two kind of public reactions to the space. The first reaction recognizes and is stimulated by this unconventional location and character. The second reaction which is the more common one is the exclamation: "Where? Industrial Area! Who's going to go there?" Many, when they heard about the location of this new arts centre, imagined that the GoDown was situated deep within Industrial Area, which is notorious for insecurity in the evenings. On visiting the space, however, they were pleasantly surprised to discover that the Centre was 10 minutes away from down-town Nairobi, and immediately neighbouring the large middle-class residential neighbourhoods of Nairobi West, South B and South C. In other words, the GoDown is very accessible by any means of transport.

Programming and Audiences

The GoDown programmed a range of shows and exhibitions during its Trial Phase, to gauge audience receptivity and as a way to begin to build its own capacities to serve as a venue for public programming. Audience response was extremely favourable, and remains so till today, indicating the keen desire and interest of various publics to engage with art.

These events programmed during the developmental phase ranged widely. The first exhibition to be held at the GoDown was the World Press Photo Exhibition in September 2003. The exhibition blazed the trail for

succeeding ones which have included visual arts exhibitions from local and international artists.

Performances in contemporary dance (Opiyo Okach and Compagnie Gaara for example), African theatre (Parapanda Theatre Lab from Tanzania who presented the play “Mfalme Juha” at the GoDown in 2004), object theatre, puppetry, and music from places as diverse as India, Zanzibar and Germany were all staged with big success. Audiences seemed to enjoy the access to local and international art forms and creativity.

New works were launched at the GoDown_ the first *Kwani?* Journal, for instance, and a new popular genre feature length film, “Project Daddy” by the Kenyan film-maker Njeri Karago_ all attracting different audience segments to the GoDown.

The space also began to play a role as a meeting ground between artists from the region for networking and ideas sharing. One such occasion, the first East Africa Arts Summit, was held in April 2004 at the GoDown. And regional contemporary dancers and visual artists frequently have encounters and exchanges at the GoDown. Writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o, returning home in 2005 after 22 years in self-exile, used the GoDown as a platform to touch base with the new generation of Kenyan writers and in November 2006 Wole Soyinka visited the GoDown and interacted with Kenyan writers.

The GoDown continues to provide regular weekly public programmes, after the completion of another phase of renovations of the performance and exhibition areas in the last quarter of 2006. This is pushing the visibility of the Centre to new level. It is shifting its profile from being an artists’ workspace into a public space, where audiences can experience art under diverse programmatic series_ Urban series, Roots series, East African music series, New Drama series, Contemporary Dance, Kiswahili series, etc. All these programmes aim at giving voice to Kenyan and African practitioners in the performing & visual arts.

Ramifications and Implications of the GoDown

What is the significance and impact of the GoDown to Kenya and the East Africa region?

Its impact, in such a short space of time is quite impressive. Currently, the GoDown is one of the few spaces with a finger on the pulse of contemporary

Kenyan arts and culture. It is poised to play an important role in the country's on-going search for Kenyan identities. But as it does so, the GoDown will need to consider its relationship to the notion that, while promoting contemporary authentic African voice, it may also have a role to play in the revival of traditional voices that died with colonialism and the advent of Christianity. It may also be important that the GoDown keep, in tangible memory, the artists who came before and struggled for freedom of expression and right to identity; who kept the faith alive, during the colonial era and the difficult censorship period of the mid-seventies and the eighties. The Centre's agenda would do well to give them due recognition as individuals whose heat helped light the flame for the founding of the GoDown.

East Africa Arts Summit July 2005, Zanzibar

A Zanzibari artist, who goes by the name Kijogoo, at a recent meeting of East African artists, gave an apt illustration of the moment we find ourselves in today as East African artists, an allegory that is pertinent to the story of the GoDown.

Kijogoo recounted the story of the chicken that was tethered to a bush by a string, only a few feet long. At first, the chicken tugged and tugged at the string in vain, wishing to venture further out, to scratch at new ground for delicious bugs and tidbits. After struggling for some time and eventually realizing that she was indeed limited to scratch only within the length of the string, the chicken acquiesced.

For four days, the chicken remained tied to the tree. It pecked about in a circle, the radius of the string. On the fifth day, however, the chicken was untied and was now free to wander anywhere. As it had done on the previous four days, the chicken extended its search for food only as far as the length of string could stretch. But something felt different to the chicken. She took two tentative steps forward, further than the distance she had become accustomed to while tethered. Surprised, the chicken paused, one foot raised mid-air in question_ no string attached? Again, she took another two careful steps forward. Suddenly, panicked, she turned and fled back to the confines of the tree she had come to know as her space. She could not accept that the string was no more. She did not believe she was truly free! Kijogoo, the Zanzibari artist, concluded that in East Africa, artists behave like the chicken. The string has been cut but we are afraid to move into the wider civic space, to play our part. We are still tethered in our minds.

The presence of the GoDown is a powerful sign to all artists in Kenya, and the region, that the 'string has been indeed cut'. Gradually, practitioners in the field are beginning to appreciate this fact. Like the chicken in the story, they may at first be 'suspicious' of this emerging freedom and afraid to believe in themselves, but steadily there is a blossoming of creativity in writing, contemporary dance and film, proof that artists *are* venturing forward creatively.

Another important contribution which the GoDown is making to the field is providing a much-needed institutional framework through which principles and values can be enshrined, and development can be strategically mapped out. These functions cannot be overstated. It is not easy, or perhaps even desirable, for an ordinary artist toiling away at their sculpture, or a theatre group rehearsing a play, to be concerned about the bigger picture. Their first and primary interests are, of course, their personal artistic goals.

One of the success stories, evidence of the galvanizing and cohering effect of the GoDown, is the regional development of contemporary dance. Over the last three years, the GoDown has been the centre for regional dance events_ workshops, collaborations and performances. Through the services provided by the GoDown as producer, project administrator and broker, one now sees young dance companies begin to grow, consolidating their artistic purposes and their fledgling structures. Jokajok Dance from Kenya, and Mionzi Dance Theatre from Tanzania have both, through regional and international collaborations brokered by the GoDown, vastly grown in artistic confidence and become more alert to the importance of proper project planning and management. The GoDown has worked closely with regional dancers and choreographers, indirectly teaching them the business of managing local workshops and regional and international exchanges.

Paradoxically, while established to promote the work of local and regional artists, the GoDown is also a gateway to the rest of the world for audiences. Through the collaborations and connections that the Centre and its artists have made around the world, different and exciting international fare has been offered to GoDown audiences, including Egyptian folk music, Indian African Sufi music, contemporary dance from Cape Verde, Madagascar and the Congo, Russian-choreography and visual arts from Cuba, Brazil, USA and Japan.

Sustainability?

On a symbolic level, an independent local institution promoting contemporary arts and culture is a sign that both the cultural and democratic space in Kenya has widened. But could one not argue that the impetus that resulted in the establishment of the GoDown_ a desire to move away from the perceived 'foreign' agendas of EU cultural centres resident in Kenya_ has now simply been replaced by another 'foreign agenda', the Ford Foundation? Has not the lack of sustainability of donor relationships been already proven by examples that have come before? Will the GoDown be yet another victim?

The question of sustainability has been a key one in the ongoing partnership between the GoDown and the Ford Foundation. How does this partnership not end 'badly', as previous ones have. With the 'death and disappearance' of organizations as donor focus shifts away to some other interests and funding is no longer availed?

From this concern, taken seriously by both the GoDown and the Ford Foundation, there has been a signal outcome. In 2005, to address one aspect of the GoDown's sustainability, the Ford Foundation made a bequest to the GoDown that enables the Centre to purchase and own its own space. This is an ownership secured through proper legal instruments and structures: the GoDown operates under two legal entities_ a Trust that enshrines and safeguards the vision and purpose of the Centre, and a non-profit company with a Board selected to oversee and maintain that vision. The Centre's management charts out and implements strategies, deriving from the vision, for organizational strengthening, programmatic relevance, and resource mobilization.

The implications of ownership of the physical space are of far-reaching social importance. By securing its perpetuity, the GoDown can now root itself firmly within Kenyan civic space. The suppression of critical artistic voices over the past 40-odd years left the Kenyan civic landscape barren of dynamic and socio-politically effective organizations and institutions from the arts and culture sector. Now, with the presence of the GoDown, and other arts organizations steadily thriving within and without its walls, civil society can begin to link and partner anew with artists with a view to impacting significantly debates about citizenship, democracy, freedom and identity in Kenyan society.

Art and Health Promotion: Creativity against HIV and AIDS

Kimani Njogu & Mary Mugo- Wanjau

Geoffrey Cowley (*Newsweek*, 8 December, 2003) tells a story about how cartoons and soap operas are being used across the world to promote public health. A muppet, Kami, was used to tell the story of HIV positive children in South Africa and to fight stigma. The five year old HIV positive orphan is creatively utilized to highlight areas of life where children are most vulnerable. In making similar efforts in Kenya, Cowley refers to a radio soap opera, *Ushikwapo Shikamana* (If Assisted, Assist Yourself) in which the lives of ordinary people were creatively crafted between 1998-2004 on national radio and in comic strips to encourage community dialogue on sensitive social and cultural issues. Cowley reports that like musicians, cartoon characters and fictional detectives, muppets can change the ways in which people view the world. This is because creative cultural productions target both the cognitive and affective domains. They influence what we know and what we feel.

A number of methodological approaches and behaviour change theoretical models (such as Health Belief; Stages of Change; Social-Cognitive Learning; Reasoned Action; Diffusion of Innovation) are being used around the world in the development of health messages and to guide behavior change communication strategies - and approaches at the individual, family, community and environmental levels. With regard to sexual and reproductive health in Asia and Africa, the arts could become key for the improvement of health and well being of communities, when buttressed by consistent and correct messages provided by health professionals. Given the space to flourish, the arts can become real agents of social transformation.

The Pandemic

In order to get a grasp of how the arts can be mobilized to address issues of HIV and AIDS related stigma and discrimination, we start by situating the

pandemic and its ramifications in Kenya. The first case of HIV in Kenya was described in 1984, and since then the policy environment has gone through at least four key stages. Between 1984 and 1987, there was a general feeling that HIV and AIDS did not really constitute a serious threat. Although the government did set up the National AIDS Control Council in 1985, there were no resources to develop the required awareness-raising and knowledge-increasing programs. Indeed, it was not until 1987 that NACC formally met. Engagement with HIV was peripheral and creative artists did not address it in their works, save for a few isolated cases. The second stage, 1988-1991, showed slightly more commitment to the issue and there were some educational campaigns although these were not well coordinated. A few artists, especially in civil society, started creating works in response to the disease within an atmosphere of hostility from religious leaders who openly spoke against the use of condoms as a method of preventing infection. The Ministry of Health bore the main task of campaigning against the AIDS virus without support from other Departments, as well as civil society organizations. The third stage, 1992-1996, was significant in a number of ways. In April 1993, the government hosted the first National Conference on AIDS and discussions on the socio-economic impact of AIDS were initiated. The 1994-1998 National Development Plan included a section on the economic impact of AIDS. Civil society organizations started focusing more deliberately on the pandemic. The fourth stage, 1997-2001, saw more commitment from government as well as leaders in all sectors of civil society. Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) became involved more systematically. It is also in this stage that the pandemic was declared a national disaster. Nonetheless, although a policy guideline on HIV and AIDS was issued in Sessional Paper No.4, it took another two years for the President to declare AIDS a national disaster. Structures that were put in place during this stage have continued to inform activities in the country with regard to the pandemic.

According to the 2003 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey about 7% of Kenyans aged 15 – 49 years were infected with HIV at the time of the study. Trends show that the prevalence peaked at a level of 10% in the late 1990s (*AIDS in Kenya, 2005*). New infections among adults have declined dramatically from over 200,000 per year in early 1990s to approximately 86,000 in 2005, but deaths have continued to increase, up to 150,000 per year. Approximately 1.3 million adults and 100,000 children are currently infected with HIV and the rates in women are nearly double that of men (*AIDS in Kenya, 2005*). This

is due to a number of factors including gender related power dynamics in families and communities as well as decision making processes on matters of sexual and reproductive health. Low levels of literacy and access to education, as well as poverty and cultural practices also make women more vulnerable to the AIDS virus. The difference in infection rates is more evident in young people aged 20 to 24 years where prevalence in women is three-fold that of men of the same age (9% and 2%, respectively) (*Kenpop News*, 2005). It is estimated that about 10 per cent of adults living in urban and peri-urban areas in Kenya are HIV positive (UNAIDS, 2004).

Creative Narratives

Many individuals in the general work force, academic institutions and the arts have succumbed to the virus and still others continue to do so at an alarming rate. The mobilization of creativity to address the pandemic becomes paramount not only because people have different learning styles but also due to the interconnections between biology and art. In addition to celebrating human creativity, the visual and performance arts can be catalysts for change as well as instruments through which sensitive and complex issues can be tackled. The arts in their various forms – dance, story telling, photography, comic books, posters, poetry, film, body maps, soap operas, cartoon strips, stage performances, music and so on – are being used, globally, to deal with burning issues of gender, health, sexuality, violence and governance. They are also being utilized in the fight against HIV and AIDS in most African and Asian countries. When supported by unwavering commitment of political leaders and the enactment of facilitative policies and laws, the arts can be vital tools for community mobilization and social marketing against the AIDS pandemic. The arts resonate and are propelled by global and local events. Whether they are addressing terrorism, HIV and AIDS, corruption, dictatorships, poverty and economic deprivation, the pursuit of freedom, gender inequalities, the quality of leadership and interpersonal relationships, artists have always sought the images that capture their inner feelings about the phenomenon. Meja Mwangi (*The Last Plague*), Carolyn Adalla (*Confessions of an AIDS Victim*), Margaret Ogolla (*The River and the Source*) and Marjorie McGoye (*Chira*) have, among others, discussed the impact of the AIDS pandemic in households.

In *Chira* (1997) Otieno does not at first know how to deal with Julia's emaciated body. He is 'terrified of touching her with his bare hands' (p. 163). Left in the cold, Julia has nowhere to go and is eventually buried at the

Lang'ata cemetery. We are told:

“Gabriel had led the police to Mama Fulani at her place of work, but she denied any knowledge of the girl's family or home place. She felt she had been magnanimous not to set up a hunt for Julia when she stole her family property and ran away with it. She was affronted to be any further involved. Nobody, according to the missing person reports had been looking for Julia. Nobody responded to the loudspeaker appeal to explain where she spent her last days.” (p.166).

Whereas *Chira* is about sexuality and morality – traditional, Christian and secular – in the context of HIV and AIDS, in *The Last Plague*, Meja Mwangi tells the story of Janet and her struggles to deal with culturally assigned notions of femininity and masculinity. Janet interrogates gender stereotypes and power relations which put women at the risk of infections because of social prohibitions against open articulation of sexuality and the practice of wife inheritance. Meja Mwangi shows that social constructs such as gender are malleable and constantly changing. They are contested and negotiated in time and space. Society is taken to task in *Confessions of an AIDS Victim* because of its tendency to suppress women's voices and to provide the fodder for unequal gender relations. Patriarchy inevitably perpetuates the oppression in households and communities. In *Confessions* Adalla argues that women are victims of a socio-cultural system that predisposes them to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. This theme is also addressed by Ogolla in *The River and the Source* (1994) through the character of Becky – an air hostess married to a Canadian pilot. Becky runs away from her rural home to escape her father's control and acquire wealth. In the final analysis, the pursuit of materialism comes at a price – she contracts the AIDS virus. From South Africa, the novelist Sandile Memela tells the story of sixteen-year-old Zenzele and her ten-year-old sister Mpumelelo as they struggle to save their father. In the novella, *Flowers of the Nation* (2005), Memela shows the power of family unity as Vusi, Zenzele's uncle, steps out to take responsibility and help the children deal with the disease in their home. Things become clear to Zenzele:

“It wasn't just the youth who could bring the leaders and achievers closer to the community. What about establishing a nationwide network of school leavers? All those former students who had moved on in life could return to their schools and communities to make a positive contribution... growth begins in the mind and, like a garden, the flowers of a nation could be able to grow and blossom.” (pp. 87-88).

Significantly, creative writers are responding to HIV and AIDS in their works especially through a focus on prevention, stigma and social support at the family and community levels.

In the remaining part of this chapter, we discuss from an insider's perspective, an initiative undertaken by Africa Health and Development International (AHADI), Raks Thai Foundation and other organizations in East Africa and the Mekong region, to use the arts in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Specifically, the section looks at activities leading to an Art for Action Against HIV and AIDS Festival held in Nairobi in October 2004. The Festival was an opportunity to express grief, ensure bonding between loved ones, and show hope for the future through creativity. The Festival was not an event; rather, it was a season to celebrate creativity, in which established artists worked with younger ones to put together artistic pieces in Korogocho for display at the GoDown Arts Centre, the Nairobi Bomb Blast Site, Kenya National Theatre, and the French Cultural Centre as well as other spaces in the country. In addition, established contemporary dancers trained young *Shangilia Mtoto wa Afrika* artists in body movement to bring to the fore issues related to sexuality and HIV and AIDS. There was also a workshop on stigma and discrimination at the GoDown Arts Centre, again reemphasizing the role of the artistic spaces and creativity in the maintenance of health and wellbeing. Some of the artistic materials produced by the organizers for the Festival are still being shown as part of the communication strategies commonly adopted by AHADI.

The arts can contribute in strategic communication for combating the AIDS pandemic by being applied to behaviour change and advocacy. They can be applied in research based interventions purposefully and consistently. Strategic communication is a necessary condition, though it may not be sufficient, for preventing HIV transmission and for augmenting care and support programs (Singhal & Rogers 2003: 206). According to Singhal and Rogers (2003: 223) communication interventions ought to go beyond the mass media of television, radio, film, video and print to include crafts, art, textiles, murals, toys and other culturally appropriate expressions. On the East African coast, the *khanga*, a fabric worn by women, carries proverbs and sayings and has tremendous potential as a channel for HIV and AIDS messages. Equally, stickers in public transport could be a channel for key health statements presented creatively. A poster 'what is good sex?' developed by Youth Exchange Network in Nairobi used cartoons and a youth slang –*sheng*– to link safe sex and enjoyable sex to HIV prevention.

Singhal (2003) argues:

“Communication strategists have also been guilty of viewing culture as static and mistakenly looking upon people’s health beliefs as cultural barriers. This conceptual coupling deconstructed and reconstructed so that new positive cultural linkages can be forged. Attributes of culture that are helpful for combating AIDS should be identified and harnessed” (2003: 241).

When used as a dynamic process, culture could be a tool for social change and art can be used for the creation of awareness, behaviour modulation , advocacy, therapy and the mobilization of social support. In ‘*Storytelling as Psychological Intervention for AIDS Orphans in Africa*,’ Yegan Pillay (2003) shows that the oral tradition has played a key role in self-understanding and reading. Stories are portable and this makes it possible for them to be used in schools, places of worship, homes, community centres, and the mass media. The story can function as a catalyst for household or community discussion on sensitive issues related to sexuality. It could also allow the venting of emotions (Pillay 2003:113) as well as a creative call for social support, which includes comfort, assistance and information sharing. In African societies, the extensive social networks have historically provided social, psychological and material support in times of crisis – and it is common to see child lending, fosterage, sibling caretaking and adoption. The role of these networks can be revived through the arts. Equally, the arts could also be useful in fighting the phenomenon of denial, so prevalent in families.

Family and Denial

At the family level, the AIDS scourge is immensely disruptive. When a member is infected, family income and savings are used to feed, nurse and treat the infected individual. In certain cases, infected members break away from the unit due to stigma and discrimination. If parents become sick and die, the family is restructured and new social roles are assigned. Most African countries have numerous cases of child headed and elder-headed households. The pandemic is disruptive also of institutions as teachers, health workers and other adults become sick or die.

How does the refusal to accept that HIV exists play itself out in households and communities? Here we present some stories narrated during the Arts Festival held at the GoDown Arts Centre in October 2004.

Story 1: An incident of Exclusion: GM (Nairobi)

Baby Joy lay in her cot fighting desperately to stay alive, her fragile body battered by disease and each breath consuming her rapidly dwindling energy until finally the battle was over and she had, mercifully, gone to rest.

Her story though similar to several others I have witnessed shall remain deeply etched in my memory because, unlike so many others, the stigma related to HIV and AIDS rather than poverty took away her fighting chance.

I admitted Baby Joy as an Intern at 2 years and 10 months at a mere 12kgs with multiple infections and failure to thrive. The friends and relatives were supportive and most striking was her father who would sometimes nurse her throughout the night (a rare phenomenon as this is usually a woman's domain).

All was well as Baby Joy made remarkable progress regaining her strength and overcoming most of her opportunistic infections. The medical team was pleased; her family called it a 'miracle' and indeed she brought joy to us all. The sunshine did not last long with the mention of pretest counseling for HIV to rule out the virus as a cause for her failure to thrive.

I watched in disbelief as the loving family fell apart. Accusations and counter accusations flew between man and wife and between relatives from both sides of the family. I was certain one among them would remember Joy in all of this, but before long the visits, the tender nursing care she had received from the family, the teddy bears, the fruits, the cards and the drugs were no more. She was forgotten. Anti-retroviral therapy which was for many unaffordable was for her inaccessible because her family would not accept an 'unclean child', an 'omen', a 'cursed one'.

And so it begun: a battle fought bravely by one who had for most of her life gracefully borne the pain of disease, which in her time of need was worsened by the abandonment due to the ignorance and stigma associated with HIV and AIDS.

Baby Joy died not because her parents were poor and could not afford her treatment, but due to the stigma associated with her condition. She was born weak and was loved by all until it became evident that she had the AIDS virus, contracted through mother-to-child transmission. Although therapy was available, the family refused to be associated with an "unclean child." The child died because her parents refused to provide resources for her continued treatment.

Story 2: Sexual Abuse of HIV Affected Children: UL (Bangkok)

In a rural village of Payao province, northern Thailand, two girls aged 6 and 8 years at the time, were repeatedly sexually abused by several men, including their own relatives. One of the girls is orphaned by AIDS (her father died from AIDS related complications). The physical examinations were not conducted immediately after each abuse, therefore there was no physical evidence of the abuse. However, the local physician who examined the girls confirmed signs of violation.

The cases involved several men; one of them was a respected village elder. And because the mother of one of the girls is HIV positive and a former sex worker, the community believed that the men involved were innocent. They, instead, argued that the girls lied about the abuses, or they manipulated the accused men. A few believed that it was a fabricated scheme invented by the girl's mother to get money from the accused men.

The girls stood by their stories, even after repeated interviews by various people including a police officer, a social worker, a public defender, and one of Raks Thai's staff. Indeed, a few years after that the girls still maintained their stories. The stories were told in similar fashion with the same facts. Despite this circumstantial evidence, most of the community members refused to believe the girls. In addition to Raks Thai Foundation, other NGOs were also involved, but none of these were willing to take legal action. That left Raks Thai staff to file the complaints. They took temporary custody of the girls. Raks Thai's staff took the girls to a government Half - Way Home for disadvantaged children in a nearby province to protect them from further abuse and threats. (After the initial investigation, the police wanted to send the girls back to the families where one girl had to share a house with the accused).

Meanwhile, the parents, especially the HIV positive mother, were under pressure from the community, even her own clan to drop the charges. The relatives of the HIV positive mother forced her to move out of her parent's home where she was staying (the other mother did not face the same problem; she is not HIV positive and is still living with her husband). The relatives blamed the HIV positive mother for causing trouble and bringing shame to the family. She had to seek shelter with Raks Thai's staff. Eventually Raks Thai Foundation gave her a small sum of money to build a temporary house on an empty plot near her parent's home. She is still living in that house illegally. The community also prohibits the mother and her family from using the community forest. She and her family, even those who do not agree with her decision to file the legal charge, are ostracized by others in the community. As a result, they are not entitled to the community revolving funds provided by the government. The HIV positive mother was distraught and showed signs of a nervous break-down. She had considered dropping the charges on several

occasions but eventually changed her mind after a series of consultations with a few people including Raks Thai's staff and a counselor from the area hospital. She is still living with anxiety and is always worried about the outcome of the legal action.

The violation of children by adults is common globally and because of culture, power, economic might and so on violations are more often than not swept under the carpet. In this story the girls are violated by several men including a village elder yet the community does not listen to the children because of this family background and no legal action is taken against the violators. Through a petition by Raks Thai's staff, the girls were transferred from Payao to a nearby province to prevent threats and disruption of their education. The transfer also sought to give them an opportunity for psychological treatment and counselling. Because both cases involve several defendants, it is expected that the cases will take a few years to complete. In the meantime, Raks Thai Foundation is working with agencies such as the Office of the Public Prosecutor, the Social Welfare Department, the Child Rights Protection Foundation, and the Half - Way Home organization to develop a long-term solution for the two girls.

Story 3: The Pain of Grace Atieno: AR (Mombasa)

Grace Atieno is one woman among many who have experienced the painful, hurtful and devastating effects of stigma and discrimination even from within her own family. She is not only suffering stigma and discrimination from outsiders but also from her siblings whom she helped bring up. She learnt of her HIV status four years ago and has since then been unwell on and off. She lost her first-born daughter after a long illness. She died and left Grace with a grand child who is also HIV positive.

Due to poor health she and her grandson are constantly thrown out of one house after another by landlords. Her neighbors, fellow tenants in Swahili houses have locked communal toilets and bathrooms to stop her from using them and forced her out of their neighborhood. When she insists on having them opened, the other tenants threaten to move out. Afraid of losing tenants, the landlord gives in to their demands and Grace is forced to leave. The neighbors also refuse to let Derek, her grandson, play with their children - as he has skin infections. He can only play with Grace's children. This traumatizes the boy very much.

To crown it all, her sisters told her children of Derek's status before she was prepared to disclose it to them and as a result two of her children left home for the streets. One

of her daughters moved out of home and rented a room where she has lived for the past three years. They were afraid of getting infected by Derek. Grace's mother at one time told her to take the boy to a children's home or to a hospital so that he could die fast. This was very painful to her. She took care of the boy herself until he passed on last month.

When Derek died her neighbors did not come to comfort her and she stayed with the dead body from 2:00 am until the next morning not knowing what to do. She had used all her savings for the boy's food and medicine and she did not have any money for the funeral. So she sent for me and I helped her pay for the burial space and coffin. We called other SOAN members who helped dig a grave where we laid Derek to rest. At the moment only one of her children, a daughter cares for her. She tells her mother not to disclose her status to others. She is scared and her other son is also on and off the streets.

Grace is rejected by members of her family and community. She cannot even share facilities with her neighbors and her grandson dies a lonely death. Disclosure of HIV status leads to major disruptions in families and communities, despite its obvious advantages.

What do these stories demonstrate? Through stories of Baby Joy, Grace, and the Thai girls we are able to get a glimpse of the magnitude of the pandemic. Despite all efforts mounted against HIV and AIDS, from the start of the epidemic, stigma and discrimination have fuelled the transmission of HIV and have greatly increased the negative impact associated with the epidemic. HIV-related stigma and discrimination continue to be manifest in every country and region of the world, creating major barriers to prevention of further infection, alleviating impact and providing adequate care, support and treatment.

The stigma associated with AIDS has silenced open discussion, both of its causes and of appropriate responses. Yet visibility and openness about AIDS are prerequisites for the successful mobilization of government, communities and individuals to respond to the epidemic. Concealment encourages denial of existence of a problem and delays urgent action. It causes people living with HIV to be seen as a 'problem', rather than as a solution to containing and managing the epidemic. Stigmatization associated with AIDS is underpinned by many factors, including lack of understanding of the illness, misconceptions about how HIV is transmitted, lack of access to treatment, irresponsible media

reporting on the epidemic, the incurability of AIDS, and prejudice, myths and fears relating to a number of socially sensitive issues including sexuality, disease and death, and drug use.

Stigma leads to discrimination and other violations of human rights and these affect the well-being of people living with HIV in fundamental ways. In countries the world over, there are well-documented cases of people living with HIV being denied the right to health-care, work, education, and freedom of movement and even life. The stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS has also impacted negatively on the lives of people living with HIV (PLWHs) and created many drawbacks in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Therefore, we cannot ignore the stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS as it has made prevention, care and management of HIV and its related condition very difficult. In order to improve the lives of PLWHs through proper support, care and treatment, we have to deal with the stigma surrounding AIDS.

Discrimination and stigma at the workplace could easily force an infected person out of a job denying him/her a livelihood. This may cause a PLWH to be angry with self, family and the world. If people who are HIV+ (or perceived to be) are frightened of the possibility of discrimination, they will probably conceal the fact, will not be able to get treatment and will spread the virus (*ILO Code of Practice*, 2003).

Let us listen to the voice of Omar, a man who has lived with HIV for 14 years:

"I felt the highest level of stigma when we attended a conference for PLWHs in another country. We boarded a taxi to go to the conference venue and on the way, we passionately got into discussing HIV and AIDS. The taxi driver got interested in our conversation but the minute he learnt that all his passengers were HIV⁺, he stopped and threw us out of his car! He even refused our money It contained the virus!"

The principle of non-discrimination, based on a recognition of the equality of all people, is enshrined in the universal declaration of human rights and other human rights instruments that prohibit discrimination based upon race, color, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, property, birth or other status, including having HIV, and that discrimination on the basis of actual or presumed HIV and AIDS status is prohibited by existing human rights standards. Stigmatizing and discriminatory actions violate the fundamental human rights to freedom from discrimination. Being a violation of human rights in itself, discrimination directed at people living with HIV and AIDS

or those believed to be infected further violates other basic rights such as the rights to health, dignity, privacy, equality before the law and freedom from inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment. Violations of human rights may in turn validate stigma.

Protecting the dignity of persons infected and affected by the virus and sharing medical advances with less developed countries leads to critical reduction of HIV vulnerability
(Population Bulletin, 2002)

The arts can be vital in dealing with HIV and AIDS related stigma and discrimination because they have the unique ability to change attitudes, initiate interpersonal, family and community dialogue and motivate people to behave in a particular way. They target the emotions and influence the way we relate with others in a non-threatening manner. The arts can also help us cope with difficult situations.

Staging the Arts Festival in Nairobi

Treatment

As mentioned earlier, the Arts Against HIV and AIDS Festival brought together East Africans and partners from the Mekong sub-region. All the partners involved use the arts to combat disease, especially HIV and AIDS.

“The Africa-Asia InterAction epitomizes the heart and the character of the human spirit. It epitomizes the ability of human spirit to transcend diversity. It epitomizes the ability of human spirit to overcome difficulties and constraints of our regular difficulties. It epitomizes the will of all of us to be able to be successful to combat this virus and be able to live our lives in accordance to our true nature and that is part of parcel of this global family, part and parcel of this global solution to fight this global problem.” (Dr. Pat Naidoo, formerly of Rockefeller Foundation, during the opening ceremony).

The theme for the Festival was “Acceptance in the Face of HIV and AIDS.” It was to be primarily located in public spaces in the informal settlements of Nairobi in order to encourage debate, education, greater understanding and positive behaviour change. The aim was to ignite family and community conversation on reproductive health. Art for Action on HIV and AIDS produced innovative and experimental works of art which examined HIV and AIDS through the lens of gender, the body, the urban experience, poverty, youth, health, and life. It provided opportunities for urban youth from low-

income areas to actively participate in creating and exhibiting contemporary art within their communities. These art works encouraged the youth to take positive and well informed actions in order to collectively fight HIV and AIDS. They also got an opportunity to be mentored and to use the arts to earn an income.

The Art for Action Festival was made possible through implementing a number of art projects to which we now turn.

i) Memory Work

Memory work was begun by a group of HIV positive mothers in Uganda in the early 1990s. They used memory books and boxes to help disclose their positive status to their children, as well as to begin the process of future planning together. Memory boxes come in all shapes and sizes and can take the form of baskets, boxes, tins and so on. When used in the fight against HIV and AIDS, they represent a narrative that HIV+ parents may wish to leave to their children: advice, key information, pleasant and life enhancing memories and the warm feeling of love and affection. They are designed to help the millions of families affected by HIV and AIDS in Africa to cope with disease, death and grief, and to plan the children's future. Memory boxes or books go by the generic title of "memory work." In South Africa, the South Coast Hospice in KwaZulu Natal and the Sinomlando Project, an oral history centre at the School of Theology at the University of Natal, use memory work. In addition, HOPEHIV in partnership with the University of KwaZulu Natal, uses Memory Boxes. KwaZulu Natal volunteers are being recruited to help dying parents record their life stories and to pass on their favourite things and photographs in a Memory Box to their children after their death. These will become 'treasures' that give a child an identity and a sense of belonging. Manuals are created in Zulu and English and distributed to staff and volunteers, who are then trained to visit the homes of the dying and to work sensitively on 'Memory Boxes' with families. Through learning across nations, artistic creativity can be fired and made more responsive to societal needs.

In the popular imagination, memory work is associated with preparation for death and the celebration of life. It is a legacy for orphans, a narrative about transitioning and a link between the past, present and future. It is a communicative facility between parents and children. In contexts where treatment has not been accessible, the key messages that are communicated to

children by parents living with HIV revolve around disclosure of HIV status, changes in health status as the illness progresses, the possibility of the death of the caregiver, succession planning, and information about ancestral roots and family history which is important in the process of identity formation for the child who might grow up without parents. Within the context of the availability of ARVs, however, forms of memory work have evolved to assist people living with HIV and AIDS to live positively, to hold on to life, and to celebrate life.

There are various memory products with a range of tools in response to a spectrum of needs and situations facing HIV-affected adults as well as children. Anyone who wants to work creatively with his or her story can make a memory work. Indeed, memory work might be defined as the deliberate setting up of a safe space in which to contain the telling of a life story. This space might be a room, the shade under a tree, a drawing, a memory box or book or a body map. Whatever its form, memory work is a place where remembering takes center stage.

ii) The Body Map

The body map is a big outline of the body, with lots of space for one to express oneself and one's feelings using pictures, words and symbols. It is a memory tool with different applications and is useful for sharing and receiving support. The Body Map project for the Festival took the form of a "interview, workshop and exhibition" and twelve innovative body maps were produced and exhibited.

In making the artwork possible, participants work in pairs and trace their bodies. On these "body maps" they paint representations of the AIDS virus, symbols of personal power and areas of emotional significance. A shadow outline of their partner is included in each painting to represent the importance of support and encouragement from others. It is an opportunity to explore, record and review the ways in which an individual imagines and pictures his or her body and life. Body maps can capture the marks which experiences in life leave on our bodies (laughter lines, scars, infections, bruises, beauty marks and so on), and they can also be extended to trace and plot the paths our bodies make across life (our ancestral lines, journeys and hopes). They can be used to express how an infection flared up, how a traditional remedy helped, or a feeling held in one's heart. In another body map, one might find a story of disclosure which gets shared among friends.

With this recognition of the power of art in mind, between July and October, AHADI facilitated a team of artists at the Korogocho Redeemed Church Support Group, two artists (Bernard Otieno and Xavier Verhoest) and one psychotherapist, Annette Shwalbe, in putting together the body maps. Significantly, the work in Korogocho involved the use of body-maps to help people process and relate their memories, as well as link their present and future.

Here is the story of one of the participants as told in ink and brush on his body map.

"I was born in Jinja, Uganda. My family moved to Busia, Kenya when I was seven years old. There my father, our sole breadwinner, worked as a businessman criss-crossing the Kenya- Busia border everyday. I attended primary school in Busia and passed well but I could not immediately join a secondary school because my father passed away the same year. I had to re-sit my primary school education for the next two years. I was the oldest in my class!

I later joined a secondary school in Western Kenya where I sat my O levels. Though I did not pass well I landed a job as a clerk in a Mombasa based company. I worked there for three years. This is where I met my beautiful wife. I was later transferred to Nairobi. Life was good then. Come 1998 my wife was pregnant with our second born. However, she miscarried at three months. I thought this was normal and did not worry much. However, there was alarm after the third miscarriage. We went to a medical doctor. I was personally confused. I was convinced it was chira or witchcraft. "Perhaps one of my ex-girlfriends was jealous of my success and had bewitched my wife", I thought.

After consulting many doctors and now with a fifth consecutive miscarriage one doctor advised my now weak wife to seek HIV testing. I sneered at the idea; after all I was fiddle fit all this time. I remember that evening in 2003 when I came home to find my wife dull. It was not normal for me to ask her what was wrong. I thought it is one of those days she was itching to pick a quarrel over food, money and my beer. But this time she was dull and calm. She welcomed me in and immediately thrust a scribbled paper into my face.

"You infected me. I am dying," she shouted at me.

"What!" I shouted back

"I have HIV ... I am dying ..." I couldn't wait for her to finish. I beat my wife senseless and sent her back to her home. One year later I married another young girl hoping to get a child and for sure I got a baby girl. But she died before her first birthday. Later on that year, my first wife also passed on. I was devastated. I developed bad malaria

and a dry cough. I felt weak, sweating at night and coughing. I went to a government clinic and was diagnosed with tuberculosis. The doctor also advised me to go for HIV testing. I obliged and the results were positive. I cried a lot. I remembered my first wife. Now I knew why she died; why she had the miscarriages. I regretted passing blame on her. I missed her!

My life was a sham. I knew I had also infected my younger wife. Why didn't I stick by my first wife? I knew I was to blame. I was going to die! Back home I informed my drinking partners about my status. Promptly, they ran away. They feared I would infect them. I became the laughing stock of the village. They said I was cursed! They avoided my family, even my first born boy who was not infected. They advised my younger wife to run away from me. My efforts to persuade her to go for testing yielded no fruits.

At work, my colleagues avoided me. I grew weak and hopeless. I was dismissed from work on medical grounds, although I could still work. I was a lonely man. I got into drinking and smoking. I lost appetite.

One day I was listening to the radio when I heard a lady talk of her life with HIV. How she had changed by joining a Support Group. I immediately made up my mind to find out in my neighborhood church. That's how I got to the Gospel Redeemed Church. I met a very caring lady who told me of the Support Group and how it could help. I could wait for Thursday; the day the support group meets. I went in. Here, I met over 45 people some single, some married, young and old, all sharing and talking about their lives. I felt at home and since then I have not looked back. I made a choice, TO LIVE.

The body map concept was pioneered by an HIV-positive Ugandan Women's Group, NACWOLA. It was part of the larger Memory Box project aimed at preparing the sick for positive death. It sought to help the process, the fears, anxieties and feelings and to leave behind memories and identities, for their children's future. However, with the advent of ARVS and successive herbal therapies, the concept has evolved to become a vital tool for PLWHs to communicate to the world about the disease and reduce stigma related to HIV and AIDS. It is much less about mourning and creating a legacy and more about celebrating life. Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health (TICAH), an organization based in Nairobi, also uses body maps as therapy among PLWHs in Kenya and Asia. In their publication, *Our Positive Bodies: Mapping our Treatment, Sharing our Choices*, TICAH presents body maps from Kenya, India and Thailand. In one body map from Kenya, Amina, a 36 year old mother of three, narrates her use of images to represent her inner self.



One of the body maps made for the Art for Action Festival held in Nairobi Oct. 2005

“When drawing this, I felt so overwhelmed with mixed emotions of joy, happiness, strength and sorrow. I painted my head pink, to symbolize calmness and hope, changing to red to symbolize the pain. My inner body is blue to express my sense of determination, strength and inspiration. The black outline represents my black skin and my pride of being a black woman.” (*Our Positive Bodies*, p. 5)

The life body silhouettes in TICA’s body mapping project is an important way of telling the stories of coping, treatment, love and hope. It brings together body maps from workshops involving Society for AIDS Orphans Network in Kenya, Karavali Positive Women’s Network in India, and Saitharn Rak PHA Club in Thailand.

“Sometimes it is difficult to explain what one feels merely by words but through these paintings one can give information in detail and in a more entertaining way. It helps us to fight for life, rather than prepare for death.” **A participant.**

At the exhibition, body maps emerged as a powerful tool for learning, creating space for discussion and interaction between people, especially people with low literacy levels. HIV and AIDS were examined through the lens of gender, the body, poverty, youth, health, and life. These life experiences were shared and discussed with the public to positively contribute to the fight against stigma and discrimination. The group also used the body maps to educate their fellow PLWHs on various therapies. They drew their representation before and after the disease to showcase the remarkable progress since getting into treatment and care from loved ones.

Both at the GoDown exhibition and the one-day street art display, PLWHs had a chance to express emotions and feelings they had been hiding since they discovered they were HIV positive. As the public streamed in, silently reading through every sentence and looking at the seemingly simple drawings they reflected on the pandemic and its impact on the society. Some empathized with them, some cried while others were overwhelmed by feelings of guilt for neglecting the people infected. Emotions were intense and confusing but there was only one call: *It is time for action on HIV and AIDS related stigma and discrimination*. It was time to turn the tide.

In order to help those who may want to use this art form for therapy, we list below the steps followed by the trainers in developing the body maps at Korogocho. These steps are a general guide and artists can bring more innovations into them. We have retained the language of the trainers.

- get into pairs of two. Colours are chosen and each partner will use the same colour but in reverse (e.g, main body in blue and shade in yellow and for the partner main body in yellow and shade in blue);
- draw carefully around partner's body with a black marker pen on canvas;
- choose a colour to represent you and paint around the outline of your body;
- prepare a colour with a lot of meaning for people. Ink up your hands and feet and stamp them where your hands and feet would be. This can be a very ritualistic moment_ when people put their hands and feet in the colour and wash them afterwards;
- choose another colour and shade your partner wherever they are; outside the outline of your body;
- close your eyes and experience where in your body you feel the best or the strongest. Mark this place on your body map with an X in pencil;
- close your eyes again and try to think or “ see” a symbol that represents the best parts of you, your strength, and your special ways. Paint or draw this symbol onto a piece of paper and then again onto your power point (the X you marked in pencil on the body map);
- You can transform this part in a magical moment with introspection and when one retreats into their inner selves. The presence of therapist can be

very helpful in creating a time-out in order for participants to feel deeper their bodies and to choose the part of the body they wanted to work with. The challenge is how to translate it into a drawing/painting on a piece of paper/canvas;

- Choose a colour and paint the background of your body map;
- On a loose blank page, draw a portrait of your partner;
- play a game: take all the drawings, put them on the floor and ask everyone to choose his/her portrait;
- with the assistance of the artist, paint these portraits on the body map or stick the original portrait on paper / canvas;
- write your name, where you were born and when on the canvas;
- think up a slogan that explains you how you would like to be in the world or what you believe in. Write this clearly on your body map;
- notice all the marks, birthmarks, beauty marks, scars, stretch marks, moles, pimples, rashes and wrinkles, wisdoms lines, on your body. Draw these marks onto your body in the correct places. Next to the mark, write something about how it came to be there;
- feel where else in your body, maybe deep down under the skin, you have strong feelings, maybe good feelings or maybe painful ones. Mark these places, using pictures or maybe just colour and words which explain a little bit about that feeling;
- outside your body, in one of the corners of the piece of paper, draw a symbol of where you came from that marks the beginning of a journey. This can be a village, a culture, a heritage, a country, an emotion. Add your date of birth;
- on the opposite corner of the piece of paper, draw a symbol that relates to where you are going _ your goal, dream, vision. You are on a journey and your body is the vehicle. Join where you come from and where you are going in some way through your body;
- this is your body map so feel free to add anything else you like;
- now that your body map is complete, share your story with your partner or a friend;

- how do you feel about your body map?

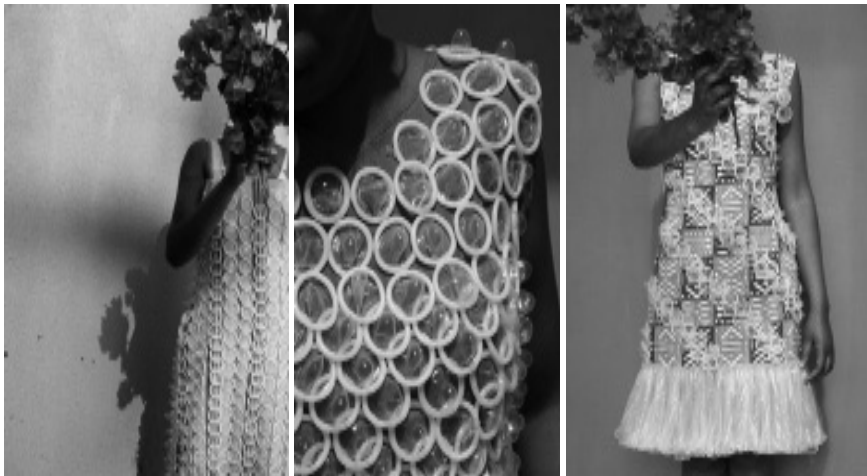
Once the body map has been completed, it can be an important tool for interpersonal and community dialogue. The therapy therefore occurs at two levels – in the process of painting and introspection and also during the conversations around the completed work.

Prevention

i) Art pieces made out of condoms

Because conversations related to sex are taboo, it has become quite difficult to mobilize individuals and communities in HIV prevention efforts in many communities in Africa and Asia. But we know also that having protected sex all the time is one way in which transmission of HIV could be contained, in addition to abstinence and faithfulness to an uninfected sexual partner. The arts can be marshalled to address prevention measures. The demystification of the condom is an important way of opening discussion on sexuality in households and communities.

Art created out of condoms may play an important role in de-stigmatizing the condom and making it a facility that can contribute in the prevention of the AIDS virus. It can be both liberating for the individual artist as well as the audience. In researching sexuality and safer sex, the artist's sensibility is aroused to address a health issue in a social context. That is what Adriana Bertini did: she broke with tradition, taboos and offered a place for the public to discuss sexuality through the image of a condom dress. That experience was relived in Kenya during the Art for Action against HIV and AIDS. In this section, we reproduce an interview with designer Juliet Isaka, who put together the condom dresses for the Festival. The interview was conducted by Otieno Wande, under the auspices of AHADI.



Condom dresses made for the Art for Action Festival held in Nairobi Oct. 2005

Otieno: How did you get into the fashion industry?

Juliet: In 2002 I got an opportunity to exhibit my work at the Smirnoff Awards where my clothes made it to the semi finals; it was quite a break because we had to do our creations, drawing inspirations from nature and not limited to using cloth. I later joined Kenyatta University and I have been designing for the Kenyatta University Fashion Week as I complete my Master's in Textile and Clothing Design there.

Otieno: Tell us about the condom dress

Juliet: Well, the first time I was asked by AHADI to design a condom dress I was impressed because I saw an opportunity to work with a different medium to create clothes. It was not such a big task given the fact that for the Smirnoff Awards we worked with different materials to create clothes. Personally, I did not think it was so sensitive because condoms are manufactured for people and to create clothes with them would be ideal. When I went home with the condoms and told my husband that I was designing a condom dress he was surprised and was eager to see what it would look like eventually. My family was not very offended by me making the dress and as I worked from home one of my neighbours came in and her first reaction was that they are beads

or pieces of wood! When she looked closely she was surprised that condoms can actually make a dress. For me, it was just a material but of course I was aware of the negative connotation that is attached to condom use...we come from a conservative tradition that views sex as taboo and as such the condom is seldom even mentioned.

Otieno: How did you make the dresses?

Juliet: It was very tedious. As you are aware the latex condoms have been lubricated and scented...it was indeed very hard to remove completely the lubricant and get rid of the scent. We had to wipe, wash and dry them before we could start using them. I had done some sketches previously and my concern was to make as hybrid as possible the outcome, since we were working based on models from Brazil by Adriana Bertini, who has worked extensively with condoms as a medium for communication. While we were not able to dye the condoms and have a variety of colours we were able to create some very unique pieces. They have been inspired by fish scales and frills and I have been able to create a sundress, sleeveless blouse and a strap dress. Thus to some extent the limitation in itself was a blessing in disguise. We also used African fabric as the basis of the creation.

Otieno: Does the condom dress create an opportunity for people to discuss condoms and safer sex?

Juliet: Well, to some extent and it is as diverse as the people viewing it. I have heard people say that it's disgusting and to them the condom dress is to take the whole condom issue too far. But one of my friends was able to even touch it and she liked the whole idea and I was able to talk to her about condoms. I think the condom dress will help us break the silence around condoms and even help demystify sex.

Otieno: What is the message you are passing with the condom dress?

Juliet: What I am trying to say through the creations is that since clothes are everyday things then we should endeavour to make condoms as basic as possible. We should not stigmatize people using condoms just like we tolerate people who dress differently from us. Just like our clothing passes a message so does the use of the condom. It passes the message of love, care

and protection.

Juliet was inspired by Adriana Bertini's creations which have been exhibited the world over. Bertini transforms expired or defective condoms into raw material to be used to make pieces of art. These frames, sculptures, and brightly colored women's dresses are intended to raise awareness and inspire reflection about condom use. On another level, Bertini hopes that by using the material at the centre of effort to prevent HIV and AIDS to create something *new*, she can inspire reflection, foster discussion, and challenge taboos.

(ii) *Solidarity Dance*

A professional dancer and a dance psychotherapist worked for four weeks with seven children living in the *Shangilia Mtoto wa Afrika* home in Kangemi. During this time, the two dancers used movement as a tool for letting the children tell their personal stories and to do a contemporary choreography. The idea behind the choreography was to endorse the values of solidarity, love and care towards PLWHs. The choreography was made of movements identified by the children. Each movement talked about their lives and their own experiences. It crossed the boundaries of choreographies and went deeper in the experiences that orphans and vulnerable children have around HIV and AIDS. Again, we present the process followed by the trainers in order to get a glimpse of what transpired between the artists.

1. First week: Team building

The choreography started with trust-building exercises, where skills and interest was shown. Trust exercise included closing eyes and being guided through touch and voice. The group started with 16 children but by the end of the week there were seven children who had been selected. Once the group was formed, the dancers and the children started getting to know each other and sharing their life stories. The life stories were translated into movement and each child picked a part and developed a movement that represented a significant moment in their lives. The seven movements formed the raw material for the first part of the choreography. The process started a dialogue between the children and the professional dancers. The dancers visited *Shangilia* to get to know the status of the children as well as the type of information on HIV and AIDS they may have received.

2. Second week: Knowledge of HIV and AIDS

The trainer showed a video with the objective of explaining to the children what contemporary dance is all about. Here the children learnt that contemporary dance is a mix of their own expressions, acting and doing acrobatics. The children continued practising the movements of their lives, in pairs. When they performed together, the choreography became synchronised.

The trainers visited the *Shangilia* Centre to learn more about the type of information the children receive on HIV and AIDS and to share the personal stories of the children. They found out that it is possible that the children have at least a parent that is currently sick and most likely HIV positive. The trainer had asked the day before for drawings that told the story of a person that has HIV. The drawings set the basis for the discussion. The following statements were made by the children:

- People can get HIV by having unprotected sex and through direct contact of blood and other bodily fluids, when you get circumcised or in an accident where there are cuts and blood;
- You cannot know, by looking, if somebody has the AIDS virus inside their body;
- The only way to find out if someone is HIV positive is when the person is very sick. People do not disclose their status. Most of the time they say they are sick from something else, like malaria or TB;
- The only safe sex is through abstinence;
- People cannot get HIV through hugging, holding hands and kissing; sharing the same clothes, plates or cups; using the same toilet; from insect bites; or witchcraft.

The children showed basic knowledge about HIV and AIDS. Asked what they would do if they discovered that someone they care for is HIV positive, they were divided: half of the children said that they would run away and the other half said they would take care of the person. After debating these decisions, all the children said that they would care for people who are sick and people who have AIDS. They would accept them and care for them. Apparently, rejection of people who are HIV positive is a consequence of lack of sufficient knowledge on mode of transmission and the power of compassion.

(iii) Community Murals

This project brought together artists, youth, PLWH, and HIV and AIDS

educators to create large murals about their lives and HIV and AIDS. These murals enabled individuals to look at and represent their immediate surroundings and be exposed to messages about HIV and AIDS.

iv) Photography Project

The photographic project created a visual space that bridges poverty, youth realities and hope, while speaking about HIV and AIDS. Inspired by the Shootback project organised in 1999 by Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), the project enabled leading photographers working in Kenya to conduct photographic workshops for urban youth. At the end of the project, AHADI felt that photography should be used to bring hope to the people and not to shock them about the effects of the pandemic.

v) Dance and Puppetry

There was a deliberate effort to use performing arts (dance, theatre and puppetry) with the visual arts in order to transcend constructed boundaries with regard to class, race and gender. These multidisciplinary teams used multi-media as a metaphor for the diversity of views and voices in the struggle against HIV and AIDS. Students from Starehe Boys Centre played instruments in solidarity with PLWH and led a demonstration in the streets of Nairobi. At the National Theatre, there were dances, poetry, drama and skits from high school students. All these activities were meant to address the issue of stigma and discrimination and to showcase the power of the arts in dealing with the AIDS pandemic.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is evident that the arts have an important role to play in ensuring health for all. They can provide advocacy tools as well as strategies for effective behaviour change communication. Because reproductive health relates to matters of emotions and inner self, it is better tackled by approaches that are both cognitive and affective, providing key information and knowledge and simultaneously allowing for emotional connection. The utilisation of art in the fight against HIV and AIDS in Africa is urgent because of the devastating effects of the pandemic on families, institutions and communities. Medical approaches to HIV and AIDS campaigns are being enhanced and deepened through deliberate incorporation

of social and cultural dimensions. Awareness creation, increasing levels of knowledge and understanding, and influencing behaviour are tasks that can be undertaken effectively through the arts. In order for the arts to situate themselves strategically to deal with the myriad of problems confronting the African continent, they need to be recognized by all sectors of the economy and buttressed by an elaborate national policy. The Ministry of Health, for example, needs to invest in the arts so that they can effectively help in implementing its function of promoting public health. The incorporation of the arts in health promotion should not be incidental but deliberate. Funding organizations, the public sector and the government ought to support the arts not only because they represent human creativity and our appreciation of beauty but also because of their values as tools for social transformation.

Notes

- 1 The East African partners included Women Fighting AIDS in Kenya (WOFAK), Kibera Community Self Help (KICOSHEP), Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health (TICAH), Shangilia Mtoto wa Afrika, Twaweza Communications, Save a Life Clinic, SOAN, Faraja Trust (Tanzania), THETA (Uganda), TAWG (Tanzania). Partners in the Mekong sub-region were coordinated by Raks Thai Foundation and were drawn from Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, China and Laos. The organizations constituted themselves as an AfricaAsia InterAction on HIV and AIDS in order to share intra- and inter-regional learning experiences through workshops, visits and project interventions. They also took part in global conferences such as ICASA 2005 in Abuja, and the 2006 AIDS Conference in Toronto.

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CHAPTER 12

Reflections on Intellectual Life and Knowing as a Problem in Alamin Mazrui's *Shadows of the Moon*¹

Ken Walibora Waliaula

"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

—John 8:31

"Man is a thinking reed."

—Blaise Pascal (French Philosopher)

When a writer becomes a victim of State terror, the very foundation of the principle of freedom of expression is put on trial.

—Egara Kabaji (*The Standard* March 12, 2006)

In a recent article in the *Daily Nation*, controversial Sudanese scholar Taban Lo Liyong berates preeminent Kenyan scholar Ali Mazrui for holding that the intellectual is someone who is fascinated by ideas. Lo Liyong maintains, "It is when 'fascination with ideas' rather than 'reflection on events and ideas' took over or became Mazrui's central preoccupation that he lost the way" (Lo Liyong F3). Lo Liyong distinguishes between engagement with "ideas" on the one hand and "events and ideas" as objects of intellectual fascination on the other. He also distinguishes between "fascination" and "reflection." He charges that this preoccupation with abstract and nebulous ideas led to Ali Mazrui's failure to fault the evils of the Kenyan regime particularly in its formative years. Lo Liyong, therefore concludes, that is why Mazrui was perceived to be no *danger* to the governments of the day in his native Kenya and in Uganda where he taught at the University of Makerere and was in fact quick to applaud the ascendancy to power of bloodthirsty dictator Idi Amin Dada. Mazrui, Lo Liyong argues, played safe by declining to get embroiled in the burning issues of the day in these two countries. Lo Liyong's attempt to split hairs over the semantics of terms such as "ideas" and "events and ideas" is probably worthy of investigation, but not in this article, much as we are fascinated by Mazrui's

“fascination with ideas.” To my mind, what merits immediate attention here is how Lo Liyong’s critique raises important questions about the relationship between intellectuals and the ruling elite. For one thing, his allusion to the possibility and probability of the perception of intellectuals as dangerous suggests that the ruling elite do not always consider knowledge as innocuous. There is a sense in which ‘knowing’ becomes a problem to those wielding power and abusing it or those who cannot exercise it without unbridled paranoia. Should, or must there always be tension between the intellectuals and the government? Are intellectuals inherently dangerous? Are there safe ways for intellectuals to navigate the sea of knowledge without raising the ire and mire of repressive regimes? What is the place of knowledge in the face of the abuse of power by the dictators of this world? What happens, as Lo Liyong says, when intellectuals get embroiled in discussing the issues of the day in their own countries?

If it is true that Ali Mazrui remained safe for not raising “a voice against the Kenyan regime,” the same cannot be said of Alamin Mazrui, his nephew, whose play *Shadows of the Moon*, is the focus of this chapter. In launching such a bitter critique on Ali Mazrui, Lo Liyong is being somewhat disingenuous. The truth is that the senior Mazrui never desisted from being embroiled in the issues of the day and he himself sees that as the reason behind the reluctance of the University of Nairobi to hire him after he resigned from Makerere. It is a tragedy that one of Kenya’s leading thinkers was never allowed to function in his native country, a situation that did not augur well for academic freedom and that, in effect, sounded the death knell to intellectual life in Kenya. Writing what appears as an elegy for “intellectualism” in Kenya, Mazrui postulates that “intellectualism” in Kenya was “killed” by the rising political authoritarianism, dwindling academic freedom, and the dynamics of the cold war era between Western powers and the Soviet block with the Kenyan government being co-opted into the Western camp, sometimes at the expense of Kenya’s own citizens (Ali Mazrui, 60). His description of the scenario that emerged deserves to be quoted at length. He states:

Being socialist or left wing as an intellectual became a political hazard. All sorts of laws and edicts emerged about subversive literature. Possessing the works of Mao Zedong of the Peoples’ Republic of China was a crime in Kenya, and people went to jail for it. My own nephew, Dr. Alamin M. Mazrui of Kenyatta University, was detained without charge by the Moi regime for more than a year for being a left-wing Kenyan academic in the company of other left-wingers as Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Micere Mugo. (Ali Mazrui, 60)

Ali Mazrui's nephew, Dr. Alamin M. Mazrui was born on March 10, 1948 at Kibokoni, Mombasa in the famous Mazrui family. His father was a renowned Muslim scholar and imam whose workstations included Lamu, Mombasa and Malindi. The pinnacle of the religious career of Mazrui's father was when he served as Kenya's Chief Kadhi in the 1960s. But his son was apparently more inclined towards a career in academia and activism rather than take over the father's mantle in the religious sphere. Alamin Mazrui went to Kizingo Primary School before joining Khamis High School, where he completed his high school education in 1968. He worked briefly as a chemist for STS, a chemical testing firm, before immigrating to the United States. He obtained a Bachelors of Science Degree in Biology at Rutgers State University and began pursuing a Master's Degree in Food Science at the same institution, until his worsening asthmatic condition made it difficult for him to operate in the laboratory. He was, therefore, compelled to switch his field of enquiry and completed his Master of Arts degree in Applied Linguistics at Rutgers, before undertaking his Ph.D in Linguistics at Stanford University, completing his studies in 1980. Alamin Mazrui's academic orientation exposed him to radical thinking; he became, as Ali Mazrui his paternal uncle aptly describes, "a left-wing academic," driven, molded and motivated more by secular ideology than religious passion.

At the time of his arrest and subsequent detention without trial in March 1984, Alamin Mazrui was Kenyatta University's representative in the Kenyan faculty union. It goes without saying that he was preoccupied with issues of the rights of workers in particular and governance in general, which put him on a collision course with Moi's government—a government that was averse to any form of activism that ran counter to the ethos and guiding principles of the governing Kenya African National Union (KANU) party. In his capacity as a union official, Mazrui advocated for the improvement of the terms and conditions of work for university lecturers. The rights of workers particularly formed an integral part of his activism, as well as his creative and intellectual engagement. Not surprisingly, his most successful and most widely read play *Kilio cha Haki* is centered on a confrontation and conflict between a colonialist employer, Delmonte, and his downtrodden and underpaid workers. For its thematic concerns and aesthetic value, *Kilio cha Haki* remains one of the most important plays in Kenya's literary canon and shares pride of place with Francis Imbuga's English play *Betrayal in the City*. Both plays orchestrate sensitive themes of governance and leadership in

Kenya. Mazrui uses a visionary and revolutionary female protagonist, Lanina, to mount a scathing assault on bad governance and the trampling on of the rights of workers. Contesting the inhuman treatment of the worker, she leads a successful strike and a revolt and transforms the status quo to the workers' delight and relief, and to Delmonte's chagrin. Although the critique of the Moi regime was thoroughly toned down in the final version of the play by shifting the setting from the post independence era to the colonial period, the underlying message and the ideological underpinnings of the play seem to have played a major role in the government's decision to detain Mazrui without trial. It was not lost on a section of Moi's intelligence machinery that colonialism was but a kind of smokescreen or a form of stratagem for vilifying their master's own mode of governance and the perpetuation of the oppression and exploitation of workers in general, and the muting of intellectuals who raised disturbing questions in particular. It is notable that the government continued to pay paltry salaries to university instructors who had spent years in the rigors of higher education, whereas semi-literate sycophants were rewarded with well-paying senior positions in government or parastatal organizations or were allowed to plunder the economy with impunity.² Mazrui had written a play that has the workers' plight as the axis around which it turns at a time when anyone articulating the rights of workers was perceived by the government as Marxist and therefore a danger to society. Moreover, Mazrui was unambiguous about his Marxist leanings at a time when Marxism was anathema - espousing it constituted, in symbolic terms, walking a road teeming with political landmines.

President Moi's warning at a public rally in which he stated in no uncertain terms that the "six troublesome lecturers," would be punished severely preceded Mazrui's detention. There were inevitably different levels of radicalism in the circle of intellectuals who dared the Moi leadership, with some being more vocal and visible than others. Mazrui states that he had a somewhat moderate critical stance on issues of governance in Africa in general and felt compelled to make his stance clear in his teaching but he did not envisage being detained since he was not as radical as his academic colleagues Katama Mkangi and Willy Mutunga who were quite clearly visible, vocal and strident in their indictment of the Moi regime. In fact he warned the two of their likely detention and attempted to hide them in his house to enable them elude the police dragnet. He could only surmise that his detention was somehow connected to his play *Kilio cha Haki* because his interrogators

quizzed him at length over the play's contents. And he was not wrong.

In this chapter I focus on Mazrui's *Shadows of the Moon* rather than *Kilio cha Haki*, the play that earned him considerable critical acclaim as well as two years in detention without trial. I am more preoccupied with Mazrui's prison writing; his ability to continue writing while under incarceration, his thematic concerns and the rhetorical techniques he employs while writing as captive of state. Although the content and form of these works written in prison may not necessarily constitute a unique "prison form" it is worth the while to investigate them and elucidate the motivations for the writers' stylistic and thematic choices.

It is evident from the nature of the interrogation to which he was subjected and his (mis)treatment in prison that his detention was meant to stop his writing. *Kilio cha Haki* had ruffled the feathers of the Moi regime, which therefore deemed it necessary to imprison Mazrui to "teach him a lesson in obedience and submission" as Ngugi wa Thiong'o would put it (Ngugi xi). Mazrui was denied access to pen and paper. By the time of his detention, the prison authorities had realized the "danger" of toilet paper as potential material for writing. It was not lost on these authorities that Mazrui's predecessors on the list of prisoners of conscience, Abdilatif Abdalla and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, had had their prison writings published after they had scribbled their initial drafts on toilet paper.

The prison system thus responded by ensuring the significant diminution of Mazrui's supply of toilet paper. It is therefore interesting that Mazrui managed to write at all while under such conditions. He transformed the margins and spaces between the printed words of the Bible he was given, presumably to mollify his spirit of defiance and resistance, into spaces for scribbling his thoughts. He also resorted to pick pocketing to obtain pens from unsuspecting prison warders whenever and wherever he came into close proximity with them. Once, he mustered the courage and resorted to trickery to pick the pocket of a pilot while aboard a light aircraft from Kamiti Maximum Prison in Nairobi to Shimo la Tewa Prison in Mombasa, where he and other detainees were set to appear before the detention review commission. Mazrui's recourse to stealing pens from his captors and turning the spaces between the printed pages of the Bible into writing pads underscores his defiance and his determination to write. In a certain sense it recalls certain traits of the "picaro," which as Charles H. Nichols remarks, is prevalent in both autobiography and fiction, particularly of the black literary corpus.

(This is not to imply that the prisoner writer is fundamentally a picaro, but he may be inclined to exhibit some picaresque attributes to a certain extent). Nichols cites the example of Josiah Henson who recounts unapologetically in his slave narrative, *Father Henson's Story*, how he won girls by stealing his master's chicken (Nichols, 284). Like Henson, Mazrui steals from the oppressor to reclaim his personhood through writing. It is also crucial to note that Mazrui uses the colonial experience both in *Kilio cha Haki*, and in *Shadows of the Moon*, as a ploy to critique "post-colonial" Kenya in his first play. Like the picaro characters in fiction and orature, Mazrui "survives [intellectually and creatively] through stratagem" (Nichols 284). If hiding behind the hedge of colonialism in order to interrogate authoritarianism in post independence Kenya is a subterfuge that does not elude the hawk-eyed Moi intelligence machinery, it is noteworthy that the discovery of the 'pernicious' potential of Mazrui's first play, was somewhat belated as it happened several years after the publication of *Kilio cha Haki*. But more emblematic of Mazrui's picaresque attributes is his ability to outwit the prison authorities and to write, effectively running counter to the objective of his incarceration namely to stop his writing hand and disable his thinking mind.

Determined to keep his writing fire burning, Mazrui wrote *Chembe cha Moyo*, an anthology of poems, and *Shadows of the Moon*, an iconoclastic play that seems to ask more questions about independence than it answers. *Shadows of the Moon* is a play that dramatizes the interplay between knowledge and power.

If by imprisoning Mazrui the state hoped it would stop him from writing works that were critical of it, it was very mistaken. A Marxist, Mazrui wrote *Shadows of the Moon* with the same emphasis on the dialectical relationship between workers and the bourgeoisie class that owns the means of production as in *Kilio cha Haki*. *Shadows of the Moon* is set in Lindi, a fictitious country that is just emerging from colonialism. Lindi is thus longing to hold its own after decades of colonial domination and subjugation. Sadly, Lindi as a nation clearly remains in the shadows of colonialism, which mutates into neocolonialism, hence the ever-present imperial influence in the guise of indigenous sovereignty and independence. The mention of the country's colonial governor Evelyn Baring, however, who was governor in colonial Kenya between 1952 and 1959 at the height of the Mau Mau uprising, suggests that Mazrui's Lindi is indeed decipherable as his own native country Kenya (SOM, 121). The decision to fictionalize one's own country in order to critique it is born of the realization that an explicit mention may imperil

the writer and perhaps diminish the chances of acceptance of manuscripts by a publisher. It is also a pointer to the harsh realities of the economy of free expression in post independence Africa. Mazrui is not alone in masking critique of his country in symbolism: Imbuga's fictitious country Kafira (a rearrangement of "Afrika," the Swahili name for Africa) is Kenya, and in *Sauti ya Dhiki*, Abdilatif's image of a crocodile that deludes himself with the illusion of immortality is Kenya's first president Jomo Kenyatta. At this juncture we have to take cognizance of the actual realities under which the writers wrote; some of them (eg Abdilatif and Mazrui) were in prison literally (while all of them were in prison metaphorically given the absence of political and intellectual freedom and the harsh sedition laws that were then prevailing in the country).

H. Bruce Franklin's conceptualization of American society as being prison-like finds resonance in the Kenya scenario. Franklin argues that every nook and cranny of American life is affected by the inescapable "shadow of the prison" to the extent that everyone virtually becomes a prisoner. It is perhaps the overarching element of surveillance that best explains Franklin's linkage of American society and prison. He writes:

Constitutional liberties give way to "law and order." The social crisis spreads addiction to drugs; even in affluent suburbs, uniformed guards patrol the corridors of high schools. Citizens triple lock themselves in their homes and *grow accustomed to electronic surveillance*. The growing resemblance between prisons and the rest of society becomes harder to ignore." (Franklin 1989, xii). [Emphasis mine]

It is instructive that Chacha (1988) makes a similar claim in his analysis of Abdilatif's poems, positing that "*Sauti ya Dhiki*...kinaonyesha maombolezo ya tabu za mwandishi wakati akiwa kifungoni na tabu za wananchi wote kwa jumla ambao ingawa kinadharia wana uhuru lakini kimatendo nao pia wamo kifungoni."/ ' *Sauti ya Dhiki* demonstrates the mourning [and melancholy] of the poet while in prison but at the same time unravels the misery of the citizenry which, despite being free in principle, is practically also in prison.' (Chacha 65). There was thus the necessity for writers, both in and out of prison, to turn to circumlocution and circumspection, which was provided by imagery and justified as poetic license.

It is my view that it behooves the critics to unravel the deeper meanings and the application to the realities of what Mapanje has called the "Kenyan predicament" of independence. *Shadows of the Moon* suffered the misfortune

of being subjected to undeserving inattention. Let me for a moment provide insight into the synopsis of the play.

Shadows of the Moon is a five-act play that is roughly divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the independence celebrations of Lindi and the coronation of King Kibaraka Mufujamali (Act One). The second part of the play takes us back in time, capturing the colonial experience, the divide and rule tactics of colonialists and their suppression of the peoples' awareness (Act One-Act Four). The final part of the play takes us to the celestial court in which Tafuta, the inquirer, the knowledge seeker, is dead and stands accused of sedition and committing suicide while in detention (Act 5).

The play begins with the coronation of Kibaraka as the Mutemi or King of newly independent Lindi. The ceremony is marked with pomp and color and has the appearance of an otherwise smooth transition from the era of the European King to independent indigenous rulership. Inevitably, dreams and promises of a prosperous future suffuse this momentous occasion. Little do the Lindians realize that in reality the sovereignty of their State is but a mirage, a mere façade and their freedom a pipe dream. Significantly even after removing his crown and putting it on Kibaraka's head, the European King exits only to re-enter and to sit on a more elevated throne behind Kibaraka's throne. Kibaraka, whose name means stooge in Swahili, is little more than a stooge or a puppet of the imperial powers in a neocolonial dispensation. Upon ascending the throne, Kibaraka who the Lindians credit for their *Uhuru* (independence), evinces an astonishing readiness to do his imperial master's bidding by promising to crush any and every form of dissent in total disregard of the rights of the citizens enshrined in the Lindian constitution. Kibaraka's overt threat to the dissenters, in his words "disgruntled elements" determined to "destroy all that we have striven for" (SOM, 5) is apiece with the colonial response to native demands for freedom from the colonial yoke. The playwright then takes us to the historical foundations of the Lindian nation, tracing its colonial heritage which authenticates Mapanje's assertion that the crux of the matter is that the post independence African leaders inherited only bad traits from their colonial predecessors (Mapanje 2002).

When Tafuta says towards the end of Act One, "I must watch this mysterious scenario", this is also an invitation to the audience to move with him back in time and to interrogate the foundations of the Lindi nation-state (SOM 9). This section of the play brings to the fore the suffering of the servile

African workers under the capitalistic market forces espoused by the colonial system. It takes a religious leader, Priest Kigonde to arouse the workers to the need to fight for and assert their rights. It is him who admonishes them to join the National Workers' Alliance, a workers' union that would articulate and advance their grievances against the stifling colonial labor laws. "Now brothers and sisters, when the Lord desired your spiritual salvation he sent you religion. Now that he desires your material salvation, he has sent you another organ, a Worker's Union "(11). The temporal shift in the action on the stage brings us into direct encounter with the colonial period, which dominates the entire play. This section of the play is thus a kind of extended flashback. Tafuta, whose name means "search" or "seek" in Swahili, embarks on a perilous mission to find out Kibarak's secrets. His act goes against the grain of the "epistemic violence" that the kingship tries to impose on the subjects by blocking certain avenues of knowledge and perpetuating ignorance and the worship of the King. In a sense the King does not just speak as a god, he is a god, knowing good and evil—to stretch the biblical allusion of the Fall in the Edenic paradise—and therefore he is in a better position to determine and isolate for the populace archetypal adversaries, good and evil, virtue and vice. Tafuta, the knowledge seeker, hides in the basement room of the castle and witnesses at the same time as the audience a chronology of events that look like lessons by the colonial administration on how to deal with dissent.

Besides the overarching theme of the relationship between knowledge and power, Mazrui articulates various other themes in the play including betrayal, the interplay between the private and public, the quest for justice and social change, and sacrifice. It is sensible to state that these themes are not unique or exclusive to prison literature. In other words it would not require conditions of incarceration for a writer to address such issues in his or her literary output. But Mazrui's concern with the creation of a just world impacts his desire to bring up these issues in line with the tradition of resistance literature. And his incarceration gives their treatment moral and political urgency.

As a victim of state terror, Mazrui is well aware of the pitfalls of resistance including the propensity by some in the struggle to become turncoats and betray their colleagues. Betrayal, therefore, inhabits a significant space in Mazrui's thematic concerns. The main conflict in the drama revolves around the move by members of the National Worker's Alliance to stage a strike during celebrations to mark the capital city's silver jubilee. The strike leader Bombazi,

the Secretary General of the Union declares, in a clandestine meeting with freedom fighters: "If we can launch a successful general strike and sustain it for about two weeks it would virtually paralyze the economy and weaken the system considerably" (29). Bombazi is keenly aware of the role of peasant workers, exploited and oppressed, as the pillars of the colonial economy. Priest Kigundu rouses the impoverished and deprived workers against the colonial hegemony and to seek their "economic salvation." The formation of the National Workers' Alliance as a veritable vehicle for the articulation of their interests and demands and the realization of their dreams, seems to galvanize the workers and to make them want to fight together as a united entity. As fellow sufferers they are ostensibly united in their squalor and want. But true to Priest Kigundu's caveat, the struggle for "economic salvation" is replete with difficulties, including familial disruptions, intrigue, unfounded suspicion and infiltration of traitors in the ranks of the workers' union.

There is betrayal that emerges at the family level. Bombazi is betrayed by his wife who, unwilling to sacrifice and withstand sexual deprivation occasioned by her husband's endless labour movement activities, abandons him. She bemoans the woes brought to bear on her private life because of her husband's public life: "You don't even...even desire me these days! You know how long it has been since...since... Well, it has been over six months" (50). The storm that rages in Bombazi's marriage is a classic example of the impact of the struggle on individual families. It may well be that she is justified in vilifying her husband for his inattention and for failing to balance the demands of the Union and the workers' plight on the one hand with the dictates of conjugal duties on the other. At the behest of her complacent parents, Misa abandons her husband and in so doing underscores the tension at the family level in the course of the struggle. But in another sense her failure to stick to her husband at a crucial moment in the struggle is an act of betrayal directed at him and the workers at large. In order to emphasize this betrayal, Mazrui creates Temu's wife Muli as having unfailing loyalty to her husband. Muli's intuition leads her to help her husband to recognize Amiyo and Adili for what they really are; turncoats being used by the workers' enemies to undermine the struggle for change. Muli as a selfless and supportive wife is a foil to Misa. Unlike Misa, Muli realizes that failure to subsume one's individual interests to those of the collective is tantamount to betrayal. As wives of workers' union leaders, both women are in almost identical circumstances, and by reacting differently, they show that betrayal is perhaps a personal choice people made regardless of circumstances.

Mazrui further develops the theme of betrayal by depicting the colonial dispensation using wily and manipulative stratagems to make the workers betray one another. Early on in the play, when a section of workers from a particular ethnicity accede to the colonial government's initiative to form a rival Union, the African Labour Union, betrayal is inevitable and chinks begin to appear in the workers' armour. The colonial administration sponsors the formation of the rival Workers' Union, one that is friendly to the colonists, in order to divide the workers down the middle and consequently enfeeble their resolve to fight for their rights. While the genuine National Workers' Union aims to paralyze the economy through a national strike, the colonists scheme to forestall such an eventuality through the counterfeit African Labour Union. Rhodes, the colonial administrator, announces the scheme to scuttle the workers efforts to ameliorate their underprivileged position when he says in an Employers Workers Council meeting: "In alliance with Timosi [a traitor] we can undermine and probably destroy the [National Workers'] Alliance altogether. As for the tribal problem, we may be able to use it to our advantage for the time being _ remember our old colonial policy of divide and rule" (22).

Rhodes statement alludes to the British colonial policy of "divide and rule," which historically proved effective in crushing African resistance, as he seems to acknowledge (Boahen). Thus, the same tactics are employed against the workers in the drama to divide them along ethnic lines and weaken their resistance. Whether the government employs what Gramsci would call "coercion" or "consent," the presence of a rival workers union led by Timosi, is a betrayal that undercuts the unity of the workers. But it is the insidious hypocrisy and betrayal of those within the National Workers' Alliance that spells doom for Bombazi and the interests of the workers in general. Bombazi, like the Biblical figure Jesus, has to contend with slander, intrigue, and ultimate betrayal. Bombazi's own fellow officials of the National Workers' Alliance, Amiyo and Adili turn out to be unlikely sources of danger and cause no little trouble from within. For one thing they hoodwink workers of the Brishan Company to go on a unitary ill-timed and ill-advised strike, which Bombazi later terms "tactless" since it comes before the national strike. The authorities easily quash the strike.

Eventually, the traitors collude with the Indian police inspector and thugs to raze the offices of the rival African Workers' Union and blame it on Bombazi. Bombazi is sentenced to a four-year term in prison on the fabricated

charges of arson. Yet his imprisonment does nothing to deter the relentless determination of the workers to go on strike during the capital city's silver jubilee. Despite Bombazi's languishing behind prison walls, the general strike goes on as planned, crippling the economic machine of the colonial hegemony to which the economic imperative was paramount. Through the prison administrator Hendrick, the colonial government offers to release Bombazi on condition that he calls off the strike. Bombazi replies: "I prefer the prison to your kind of freedom Hendrick, freedom that is more incarcerating than the prison! No, thank you" (124). The oxymoron "freedom that is more incarcerating than prison!" with regard to the offer of release, epitomizes Bombazi's fear of being tormented by a guilty conscience for betraying the workers. He would rather remain in prison than betray the cause for which he has sacrificed so much already. For his uncompromising position he is summarily and brutally eliminated in an extra-judicial execution.

Mazrui is preoccupied with the issue of justice in society. By presenting Bombazi's extra-judicial execution, he raises fundamental questions about the criminal justice system in colonial Lindi. The State machinery murders Bombazi without granting him a free and fair trial. It is a blatant denial of justice and a trampling on the rights of the accused who, as is the case in many lands, is presumed innocent until proven guilty. But the gravity of the miscarriage of justice in Bombazi's case is heightened by the fact that the State colludes with known criminals to carry out an arson attack on the rival African Labour Union, and then it arrests Bombazi for allegedly committing the felony. The government is therefore depicted as what I may call "a criminal government" operating with unjust laws or without laws at all. Who will protect the people from such a criminal government, Mazrui seems to be asking. Bombazi's murder coming as it does in one of the two major peaks in the drama, if anticlimactic, becomes the catalyst for mass action that culminates in the achievement of independence from colonial rule in Lindi.

But even after the so-called flag independence, Lindi still has to grapple with the relics of an unjust colonial legacy and the struggle between knowledge and power, issues that are focal points in Mazrui's play. The play is an attempt to paint the anatomy of an independent African state divided between inheriting colonial characteristics wholesale or creating its own identity. If the colonialists abused power so much that it culminated in Bombazi's brutal murder, Kibaraka as a leader of an independent Lindi, assumes absolute

power and abuses it fearlessly. Eager to ape his colonial predecessors, he criminalizes the acquisition of certain forms of “knowledge” particularly, the kind of knowledge that unveils his darker side. Like the former colonial rulers, Kibaraka is intolerant of dissenting views. In ensuring the unquestioning submission of the citizenry he displays total disdain for the laws of the land. He states in a supercilious tone and in no uncertain terms how his powers transcend the margins of existing legislation:

I, Kibaraka Mufujamali wa Lujinga, the all-mighty Oba and the ubiquitous arm of Lindi, the Omusaje Abasaje -yes, husband of husbands-, inspired by wisdom and Omniscient God and the unanimous voice of the Lindians in all my visions, in exercise of my regal powers beyond those accorded by YOUR constitutions, hereby decree that no Lindian, regardless of tribe, sex or religion shall enter my rooms in the basement of this castle in an attempt to know what lies therein (SOM 6).

By referring to the constitution as “YOUR constitution,” Kibaraka at once expresses his alienation from the populace and his contempt for a document he perceives as no more than a worthless piece of paper. There is such a huge schism between the ruler and the ruled that it is impossible to envisage concern for the welfare of the ‘masses’ in this kind of political dispensation. It needs to be pointed out that the use of the Yoruba title “Oba” contributes to situating Lindi as any African country and not Kenya in particular. With leaders of this kind, it is not surprising that, like most African states, independence in Lindi does not translate into freedom for all.

In entering the secret chambers of the King’s palace, Tafuta comes to grips with the fact that Kibaraka’s actions and inactions are a mere mimicry of the colonial master. If the African leader thrives on the mimicry of a highly unpopular, heartless and insensitive colonial mentality, in witnessing on the stage the exercise of raw colonial power and its iron-handed tendencies, we are vicariously witnessing the quintessence of failed African leadership and its blind imitation of the most obnoxious and injurious attributes of the colonial legacy. The implication is that African leadership in general, and Kenya’s in particular, is as far removed from the sensibilities and realities of the population as was the colonial establishment. Characterized by oppression and disregard for the interests and welfare of the masses, the new Lindi administration is a reflection and a refraction of the colonial bedrock upon which it is built. It would seem the failure of the nation-state and the disenchantment and disillusion it occasions are predicated on the fact that the nation-state is an edifice, constructed on a faulty foundation, and is therefore fundamentally

flawed. There is a sense in which the 'sins' of colonial Lindi serve as a shadow of the 'sins' of post independence Lindi. This apparent conflation of the colonial and the post-colonial is Mazrui's way of saying there is indeed no significant advantage gained by the acquisition of flag independence when the leaders of independent African states elect to perpetuate the same unjust colonial structures.

For defying Kibarak'a's edict against unraveling the secret contents of the basement rooms, Tafuta is incarcerated and deprived of his freedom. He decides to take his own life at play's end, only to reappear in a celestial court charged with disobeying the King and taking his own life. Nevertheless, the play *Shadows of the Moon* ends rather ambiguously without the court's final verdict being pronounced. The uncertainty of the outcome of the legal proceedings in the mystical heavenly court is presumably an expression of Mazrui's own uncertainty regarding his fate as he wrote the play while languishing in a solitary cell at the infamous Kamiti Maximum Prison (not knowing when or whether ever he will be released or arraigned in a court of law.)

His isolation was premised on the belief that he would infect other prisoners with his poisonous radical ideas and ideologies. Through Tafuta, Mazrui ponders his own fate. Tafuta, the character whose thirst for knowledge drives him to know the forbidden is a product and an instrument of Mazrui's own moments of self-reflection, how he takes stock of his position as an intellectual fighting for social justice in an anti-intellectual post independence Kenya. Moi had made good his threat at a public rally that "the six university dons" would be dealt with accordingly and the result, for Mazrui, was this physical, mental and psychological affliction. There is therefore an overlap between the text and the context in which it was composed.

Two things deserve mention here; first Tafuta's suicide may be deemed a defeatist venture that accentuates the level of pessimism, and perhaps nihilism, that informs his estimation of his country's democratization process. The hero's suicide comes after a vicious assault on his psyche under the unbearable conditions of incarceration. He is 'dead', mentally and psychologically. It is as if by taking his own life he is raising the hypothetical question: what is the point of living in a physical body when one's spirit has already been "killed" by the jailers. But such tragic exit makes Tafuta's quest for knowledge an exercise in epistemological futility. It may well be said that Tafuta is paralyzed,

not by his acquisition of “dangerous” knowledge, but by the oppressive system that forbids any knowledge threatening to expose its rulers’ foibles, excesses and aberrations. It is not the knowledge that is dangerous; it is the government’s reaction to those who gain such knowledge that is dangerous. Like the Biblical Adam who is sentenced to die for eating the fruit from the “tree of the knowledge of good and bad,” Tafuta must pay the ultimate price. But Tafuta has lost faith in the criminal justice system of Lindi and cannot wait for it to execute judgment on him, so he takes his own life like Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* whose suicide is in part a disavowal of the pernicious colonial legal system. Both Tafuta and Okonkwo may be seen as at once heroic and cowardly. However, whereas we know next to nothing about Okonkwo’s afterlife, Mazrui grants us an opportunity to see Tafuta arraigned in a celestial court. This brings us to the second issue that comes to the fore: Mazrui’s invention of a heavenly court. Does the celestial court succeed where human jurisprudence has failed in ensuring a just and fair dispensation of justice in Tafuta’s case? It is significant that the judge in the celestial court is a female “angel-judge” assisted by three angel assessors_ two female angels and one male. If compassion and tenderness are a quintessential aspect and attribute of femininity, can we speculate that the celestial court is bound to undo the rampant perversion of justice in Lindi?

Like Dante’s *Inferno* and Euphrase Kezilahabi’s *Rosa Mistika*, which present us with experiences beyond the quotidian range of human experiential and existential realities, Mazrui stretches our imagination to the limit, conceiving of a system of heavenly jurisprudence. This is a juridical system that is very much unlike the mundane earthly ones with their tendency to favoritism and perversion of justice. Mazrui’s invention of a fictional heavenly court may be seen as emblematic of his loss of faith in the Kenyan criminal justice system symbolized by the Lindian legal debacle. The travesty of justice was so pervasive in Moi’s regime that victims felt inclined to hope for divine intervention, however unlikely. It is difficult not to see Tafuta as the encapsulation of Mazrui’s meditation on his own choice of the perilous course of “intellectualism” and activism against Moi’s despotism (Ali Mazrui 60). Mazrui had embraced Marxism and dabbled in unionism which gave him and those of his ilk a pariah status in the eyes of KANU establishment. It may be said that at this point Mazrui’s optimism for a better Kenya, in which there would be just laws, respect for the rule of law and the inalienable rights enshrined in the constitution by both the rulers and the ruled, had drastically waned.

Moi, like Kibarakia in the play, had continued to trample on the constitution and the laws of the land with impunity. It was as if the constitution was not worth the paper upon which it was written. But the Kenyan constitution itself was fundamentally flawed and open to abuse.

It, for example placed the President above the law and paid lip service to freedom yet in the same breath endorsed the detention of government critics without the benefit of a trial, be it fair or otherwise. It is safe to speculate that the trauma of solitary confinement might have caused Mazrui to have misgivings about his own role in the struggle as uncertainty hang over his own fate. Tafuta is hence a metaphor for Mazrui's own quest for a deeper understanding of his circumstances as a prisoner of conscience, an intellectual and an activist, reduced to an object of confinement, scrutiny and surveillance by the State apparatuses. But I am not sure that even in trying to make sense of his trialsome prison experience, Mazrui's spirit of defiance had dissipated. Writing was itself an act of defiance even as Tafuta's suicide may be read as an act of defiance to despotism. Tafuta's appearance in a celestial court is indicative of Mazrui's vote of no confidence in his own country's justice system.

Shadows of the Moon is a play in which Bakhtin's dialogism finds expression in no small measure. Bakhtin observes that the novel is "a diversity of social speech types, sometimes even a diversity of languages and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized (32)." Mazrui's play evinces these aspects of the novel so much so that we are bound to concur with Kimani Njogu (2004) in proposing the extension of the Bakhtin's paradigms across the genres. For one thing although Mazrui's play is ostensibly in English there are huge chunks of dialogue in Swahili that complement and compete with the English, lending the play a high level of linguistic hybridity.

At a superficial level *Shadows of the Moon* demonstrates its linguistic diversity in its use of at least two languages, English and Swahili. The text is not entirely English neither is it entirely Swahili and as a result it tends to occupy a liminal linguistic space between the two languages. The contest between English and Swahili goes hand in hand with the dialectic relations between the oppressor and the oppressed, the workers and the industrialists, the government and the people, the tormentors and their victims, creating a multiplicity of voices that speaks to Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia (linguistic variability) and multivocality. For instance, the opening scene of the play

which focuses on the coronation of Kibaraka as King is in Swahili, with an English rendition of the conversation in parenthesis:

People: Kibaraka, Kibaraka
Ni Moto unaowaka
Simba anayesikika
Anayetisha dunia
(Kibaraka, Kibaraka
Is a burning crescendo
A thunderous roaring[lion]
That scares the world)

Tafuta: Mtemi Mufujamali
Ametuletea kweli
Uhuru wetu Kamili
Na leo twafurahia
(Our King Mufujamali
Has truly procured our freedom in *toto*
So today we rejoice) (SOM 1)

This mixing of languages and code switching comes as no surprise to the Kenyan audience for whom the play was primarily written. Code switching between English and Swahili is a common practice in Kenya. English remains Kenya's official language while Swahili is the national language. But since English is the dominant language in the text, one reads Swahili as an intrusion on the English text. This may be perceived as a reflection of the playwright's indecision regarding which language he *really* wanted to use in the play. Mazrui's *Kilio cha Haki*, the play that contributed immensely to his detention, had established him as one of the leading Swahili playwrights in the East and Central African region, the other being Tanzania's Ebrahim Hussein of *Mashetani* and *Kinjeketile* fame. The question arises—was Mazrui trying to write in English without letting go of his native Swahili tongue? I think this is a case of asking the wrong question in the first place. What I consider pertinent here is to examine the function that the dual languages approach to play writing achieves in *Shadows of the Moon*.

This duality has to be seen more in terms of contest than complementarity. Clearly, the contest between English and Swahili can be read as an extension of the dramatic conflict pitting various people and ideas against one another.

There is a contest between the colonizer, whose language is English and the colonized, whose *lingua franca* is Swahili, just as there is a confrontation between the country's ruling elite and its questioning intellectuals. It is telling that even Kibarakia must occasionally turn to Kiswahili to connect with the population. By intruding into the English text, Swahili is pining for inclusion and recognition rather than exclusion and dereliction as the new Lindi nation struggles to come into existence and to remain, rather than to disintegrate after a brief appearance. The debate about whether or not Swahili should continue to play second fiddle to English in Kenya has raged for decades. Advocates of cultural nationalism such as Kyallo Wamitila, Richard Wafula, Mwalimu Hassan Mbega, Kimani Njogu, Ken Walibora, Rocha Chimera, Kitula King'ei and Mohamed Abdulaziz have vehemently campaigned for the elevation of Swahili from the status of being merely a national language to that of an official language, the status enjoyed by English long before and since independence in 1963. When the people of Kenya rejected the proposed constitution in the November 21, 2005 national referendum, they also in effect rejected a section of the document that would have made Swahili an official language alongside English. There is, therefore, a way in which the duality of language in Mazrui's play is an enactment of the contest between English and Swahili in the national terrain in Kenya. Swahili refuses to give in "to the conceptual hegemony of an imperial language," as Jale Parla argues in a different context (Parla 2004, 119).

Nevertheless, in a larger sense, Mazrui's play presents a conflict between indigenous modes of expression and foreign ones, between African values and European influences. The fact that the European King continues to lurk behind the Lindian king's throne negates the notion of independence as culturally, politically and economically liberating. The dominance of English in the play's text is an index of the hegemony of the Western world whose shadow or manifestation touches all spheres of life in Lindi, a nation just beginning to make its baby steps. Applying Frantz Fanon's caveat about imperial domination is therefore appropriate;

Colonial domination... manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of the conquered people... Every effort is made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his culture." (Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* 236)

But the play's multivocality transcends the mere duality of language as it also contains "a diversity of individual voices" and "languages," which blend together to give it an intriguing synthesis and multivocality. In other words

Shadows of the Moon is a text with an admixture of languages, voices and texts. For example, Kibaraka uses Luhya language when he calls himself *Omusaje abasaje* (Husbands of husbands), which is itself a subversion and inversion of the Biblical allusion to Jesus as “King of Kings.” The original expression may connote dignity and splendour, but *Omusaje abasaje* on the contrary implies the virtual emasculation of the male subjects of Kibaraka’s domain and their transmogrification into some kind of obsequious slaves to the king at best, or literal wives at worst. Such reading of the play is viable given Kibaraka’s assesment of Lindi in sexual terms when he declares; “Rejoice women of Lindi, for our land, like your wombs, is now open to our seed and has deemed me your royal lover (4).”

But couching the exploitation of the land in sexual and sensual parlance is not uncommon. Ania Loomba’s analysis of European imperial infatuation with the new lands is especially illuminating on this. Loomba posits that what characterizes the colonial drama is the colonialists’ conception of the new colonies as the naked female body waiting for them to “discover” or to “deflower” (Loomba 1998,76). The colonialist as rapist and the colony as an erotic and enticing naked woman is thus a trope that finds resonance in literature beyond *Shadows of the Moon*. In Mazrui’s play, however, the rapist is no longer the colonizer but the native ruler himself. Kibaraka is unapologetic about his right to “rape” or plunder the resources of his country. Lindi suffers the double tragedy of gang rape by both the host of colonialists and the crop of post independence leaders who, as Basil Davidson rightly describes them, are “pirates in power (Davidson 243).” Mazrui is thus critiquing the wanton abuse of power in his native Kenya in which Moi and his henchmen plundered resources with impunity culminating in the infamous Goldenberg scandal that almost brought the economy to its knees.

On the whole *Shadows of the Moon* is a play that is characterized by diverse languages and voices including the language of the Bible, the language of socialism and unionism, the language of commerce and the language of the colonialist, the language of the freedom fighters, the language of traitors, the language of women, and the language of heavenly beings such as the female angels that are products of Mazrui’s fertile imagination. As Ania Loomba aptly puts it, literary works are indeed “complex clusters of languages and signs” and are extremely “fecund sites for ideological interaction” (70). These multiple voices and languages in Mazrui’s play capture the diversity of feelings and thoughts that are bound to inhabit the mind and heart of a

prisoner of conscience. Whereas Mazrui's own stance as a leftist scholar and writer with Islamic upbringing is incontestable, it is possible to conclude that in taking stock of his confinement, his own psyche is modified into a "fecund site for ideological interaction" as he tries to make sense of his place in the universe within and without the prison walls. For instance, despite his Islamic upbringing, Mazrui's play teems with Biblical allusions with a Bible quoting priest as the catalyst for the workers' revolutionary action in the drama. That detention accorded the playwright opportunity to read the Bible extensively is evident from the profusion of Biblical references.³ But this is not to say Mazrui had necessarily abandoned his Islamic faith or that he was extremely religious. I am inclined to think that, in fact, Mazrui evinces a rather agnostic attitude towards religion, which contrasts significantly with Abdilatif Abdalla's deep devotion to the tenets of Islam. Mazrui's poem "Ulimi" in his collection of prison poems, *Chembe cha Moyo*, exemplifies his agnosticism. He writes:

Kwa mara nyingine tena
 Nimekaa gizani...mawazo yakivutana
 Nikimngojea mungu,
 Mchukia waja kunena
 Aje kuuchonga ulimi wangu
 Kuniondolea Kalima
 [Once again
 I sit in the dark...pondering
 Waiting for god
 Who hates human speech
 To come and dismember my tongue
 To deprive me of the power of speech]
 (*Chembe cha Moyo* 56)

This poem may have a wide range of interpretations. For example, the "god" that the poet awaits to chop off his tongue may be the authoritarian powers that gag freedom of speech such as the new leadership in Lindi, and by extension the governing KANU terror machine in Kenya after flag independence. Yet the very fact that Mazrui employs the metaphor of god in satirical terms, (regardless of whether it starts with a capital letter or not), presumably renders such writing unthinkable, objectionable or even sacrilegious for devout Muslim writers like Abdilatif. The act of defiance to a secular state is, for him, almost synonymous with religious duty. At the same time sensibilities of Christians who view angels as essentially male may be stunned or at least

irked by Mazrui's depiction of female angels in the heavenly court.⁴

Yet in highlighting the religious voices in the text we miss the point if our objective is to investigate Mazrui's religious persuasion or affiliation. Neither is it necessary at this juncture to dwell on the seeming incongruity between religion and Marxist ideology. More germane is the recognition first of the religious voice as an aspect of the multiplicity of voices. But even more importantly we can and should discern in this move, Mazrui's somewhat successful attempt at suggesting the utilization of religion as a mobilizing force for social change. The choice of a religious leader to incite the workers to look critically at their appalling conditions and to demand an immediate amelioration is akin to a form of liberation theology. Indeed Priest Kigundu may appear to be a quasi-religious figure whose role is not to preach the Word *per se* but to mobilize the masses to political action. Clearly in his evangelising mission, the political dimension absolutely outweighs the religious one. He is cognizant of the need for the workers to seek political "salvation" through political action. Mazrui is well aware of the role of religion in Kenyan politics. Kenya has a long history of religious figures that have left their mark on the country's history for their relentless attack on bad governance, and the malaises and foibles of the political system, both in the colonial and the post independence eras.⁵

In his elegy on the death of "intellectualism" in Kenya, Ali Mazrui lays blame on the rise of authoritarian rule, dwindling academic freedom and the politics of the cold war era. Alamin Mazrui's play *Shadows of the Moon* grapples with the conflict between knowledge and power. The execution of the leftist strike leader Bombazi is a sign of transient victory for the authoritarian Kenyan government against radical intellectuals and political activism. Tafuta's suicide appears, superficially, as a form of surrender and cowardice on the part of dissenting intellectuals. If we are to think of it in terms of Ali Mazrui's sentiments on the demise of "intellectualism," then we may conclude that not only does tyranny, the stifling of academic freedom, and the cold war "kill" intellectual life, but intellectuals are compelled to "kill" their intellectual lives themselves. Tafuta's is a supreme example of a case of "knowing as a problem" to the state. Tafuta outwits the state apparatuses by first obtaining forbidden knowledge. He then outwits the state by choosing "suicide rather than surrender" as Walker Connor would put it, depriving the state of the luxury and satisfaction of killing him the way they kill Bombazi

extra-judicially (Connor 41). I want to think Tafuta's afterlife in a heavenly court with the possibility of a fair trial is an indication of the immortality and invincibility of knowledge. In this regard the suicide has underpinnings of defiance to the status quo that opposes such knowledge.

Defiance is the force behind Mazrui's successful attempt to write after being imprisoned for his writing in the first place. Like his dramatic character Tafuta, he outwits the prison authorities, stealing pens from prison warders, and once from a plane pilot, and using the pages of the Bible as a writing pad. As it turned out the prison experience so hardened Mazrui's stance he would later declare, "I became more of an activist after my detention than before" (Amutabi). Upon his release in May 1984, Mazrui was arrested three more times by the state, he was denied employment, and his passport was confiscated. He, however, managed to sneak out of Kenya through Uganda, and obtained a teaching job at Port Harcourt University in Nigeria where he taught between 1984 and 1986. By the time he was hired by Ohio State University, USA, in 1989, his involvement in proscribed movements campaigning for the respect of human rights, social justice and political change in Kenya had remarkably intensified. The two years in detention had done little to stifle his uncompromising resistance to despotism. The Kenyan state had failed yet again to vanquish the resistant spirit of a prisoner of conscience. In his play *Shadows of the Moon*, Mazrui not only expresses his "fascination with ideas" of which Lo Liyong accuses his uncle, he also meditates on his own locus in the epicentre of the political struggle. He ponders on how necessary and yet hazardous it can be to go beyond the mere fascination with ideas in confronting authoritarianism. As in *Kilio cha Haki*, Mazrui uses the colonial period as a ploy to offer an acerbic critique of the Moi regime and its intolerance toward intellectual freedom. In this sense *Shadows of the Moon* is a statement of defiance, a response to an assault on intellectual life and a reflection on knowing as a problem.

Notes

- 1 Mazrui titled his original manuscript *The Moon is Bleeding* before the editors at East African Educational Publishers suggested changing it to *Shadows of the Moon*. In both the original and later title, the “moon” is a metaphor for knowledge. The allusion to the bleeding moon in the original title was an attempt to accentuate the threat that despotic leaders pose to access to knowledge and information and the exercise of intellectual freedom. Mazrui was concerned that both the colonial and post independence governments deliberately obfuscated the history of the independence struggle in Kenya, in which the Mau Mau freedom fighters figured prominently. Whenever the abbreviation SOM appears in this document it stands for the title *Shadows of the Moon*.
- 2 The list of illiterate and semi-literate cronies who were rewarded with opulence, position and power in the Moi era includes individuals such as Ezekiel Barnge'tuny, Kariuki Chotara and Mulu Mutisya. At one point in the 1980s Chotara poured vitriol on Marxism and intimated that the police should move fast and arrest Marx and charge him with treason and sedition. Mukoma wa Ngugi certainly alludes to the same Chotara in satirical terms without naming him directly in his article “Recalling Fela Kuti’s World of Defiant Sounds” in the 16 April 2006 issue of the *Sunday Nation*, in which he states, “a highly placed Kenyan official became so exasperated with a troublemaker called Kairu Makisi (Karl Marx) that he was quoted as wondering why the government couldn’t just arrest him.” The point though, is that, Chotara’s ignorance about Marx”, typifies the level of absurdity and ludicrousness that Moi’s sycophantic supporters displayed.
- 3 Willy Mutunga, a Christian who was detained at the same time as Mazrui read the entire Koran while in prison. The same applies to Kenneth Matiba, another Christian, who was detained in the early 1990s after being on the forefront in the campaign to force President Moi to introduce multiparty politics in Kenya. Matiba was the first minister in post independence Kenya to resign from his cabinet post after differing with President Moi.
- 4 In Genesis chapter 6, the account of the angels who materialized or adopted human bodies indicate that they were attracted to women and therefore assumed male bodies. They subsequently abandoned their spiritual abode and came down to the earth as males to have sexual relationship with women, siring giants called the *Nephilim*. On the whole, almost any mention of angels in the Bible shows them as male, from angel Gabriel who announced the birth of Jesus Christ to Mary, to the archangel Michael mentioned in Jude and Revelation. In portraying angels as women Mazrui subverts what is commonly believed about angels, thereby raising questions about the very nature of spiritual beings. Just how much can human claim to know about the spirit world? This is in line with agnosticism, which in part posits that God is unknowable.
- 5 In Kenya Elijah Masinde “Musambwa”, Menza Mekatalili, Bishop Alexander Muge, Archbishop Henry Okullu, and Rev. Timothy Njoya exemplify religious voices of dissent. In South Africa Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Bishop Allen Boesak were extremely vocal against the apartheid system. In Tanzania Kinjeketile Ngwale led the southern tribes of Tanzania in revolting against German rule while in Belgian Congo Elijah Kimbangu was wittingly or unwittingly responsible for mobilizing Africans against Belgian colonial intrusion. The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) founded by Alice Lakwena, has waged war against the government in Northern Uganda for decades is another example of religion as a mobilizing force in political resistance and struggle.

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Political Culture and the Prospects of Multiparty Democracy in Kenya: Lessons from the Centre for Multi-Party Democracy-Kenya (CMD-Kenya)

Njeri Kabeberi

The arts have contributed in the development of accountability and the pursuit of democracy through encouraging community dialogue. In the recent past they have encouraged into the country a new era of multiparty democracy. Musicians, cartoonists, poets, painters, dramatists and others in the creative arts have openly criticized oppression and the suppression of ideas. They have agitated for more freedom and accountability in the conduct of public affairs as well as creating opportunities for community dialogue through public participation in politics. The arts are key in entrenching a political culture based on tolerance of diversity and democracy.

In this chapter, I examine the prospects of multiparty democracy in Kenya by drawing on the experiences from the Centre for Multiparty Democracy, based in Nairobi. After discussing the concept of democracy and the way it relates to human rights, I look at political party systems practiced in Africa and the work being undertaken by CMD as well as key issues related to political parties in Kenya.

Democracy

Democracy is a consequence of public discussion. It is a consequence of engaged dialogue and debate. James Buchanan, a leading public choice theorist, argues that the definition of democracy as ‘government by discussion’ implies that individual values can and do change in the process of decision-making; thereby supporting the argument that democracy should be seen as a developmental phenomenon, an ideal that is never completely realized, but which constantly evolves and for which we are always struggling. Democracy seen in terms of public reasoning, as “government by discussion,” helps us

to identify the far-reaching historical roots of democratic ideas across the world.

Democracy in its original ‘idealistic’ form has been described as *a government of the people*. I interpret this as a government that oversees good governance, human rights, security, provision of services, respect for the rule of law, among other roles related to provision and overseeing on behalf of the people – *by the people* I interpret this to relate to a government that ensures regular, free and fair elections. And *for the people* I interpret this as a government that constantly listens to its people; one that is transparent and accountable to its citizens. A system of government in which the principal positions of power in a country are filled through regular, free and fair elections covers a significant part of the democratic process. It however says nothing about the extent to which such a government is accountable to its people in the other equally significant areas. All human beings are born free and equal. They wish to live in freedom, and strive to have autonomy and control over their own lives. They want security and peace. The challenge then becomes: “how do you get to the ‘ideal’ democracy that affirms equality, freedom, security, human rights, the rule of law, transparency and accountability?” At its best art is the pursuit of an ideal; an dream. Art marshals the imagination to examine the past, present and future.

Some political analysts and economists have argued that democracy could be a barrier that obstructs the process of development and deflects attention from the priorities of economic and social change, such as providing adequate food, raising income per head, and carrying out institutional reform. It is also argued that democratic governance can be deeply illiberal and can inflict suffering on those who do not belong to the ruling majority in a democracy.

Professor Larry Diamond, co-editor of the *Journal of Democracy* published by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), has constantly argued that there are no pre-conditions for democracy, other than a willingness on the part of a nation’s elite to attempt to govern by democratic means. Yet sustaining this approach in the context of unfavorable cultural, social, and economic conditions requires institutions which will foster effective, accountable governance as well as robust international engagement. All of this takes time and patience. Diamond supports this argument saying that eleven of the poorest countries of the world are democracies in the sense of having

regular, free and fair elections. He adds that indeed democracy is present in every major religious and philosophical tradition, in countries that are predominantly Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian and Muslim.

In addition, Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, has written that “people in economic need also need a political voice. Democracy is not a luxury that can await the arrival of general prosperity. Moreover, there is very little evidence that poor people, given the choice, prefer to reject democracy.” He has continued to argue that the mark of a universal value is not that it has the consent of everyone in the world but that “people anywhere may have reason to see it as valuable.” By this measure, there’s growing evidence that democracy is becoming a truly universal value.

Traditional African political systems were to a significant degree infused with democratic values. They were invariably patrimonial, and consciousness was communal; everything was everybody’s business, engendering a strong emphasis on participation. Standards of accountability were even stricter than in Western societies. Chiefs were answerable not only for their own actions but for natural catastrophes such as famine, epidemics, floods, and drought. In the event of such disasters, chiefs could be required to go into exile or ‘asked to die’.¹

Democracy, freedoms and human rights are increasingly universal values. Peace is a universal value, and we are universally discovering through empirical experience and a growing normative logic that democracy, human rights, and peace are inseparable.²

Sampling Political Party Systems Towards Multi-Party Democracy and Politics

Political Parties operate within particular political party systems. The general characteristics which underpin a particular system can enhance or circumscribe the freedom of a political party to function effectively. In this section, I examine a number of political systems available for adoption in East Africa and which have been fodder for the creative imagination, especially music and cartoons.

Single Party Systems

In a one single-Party system, there is only one legal political party. Alternative parties are banned, and elections only offer the electorate a choice of

candidates from the ruling party. In theory, this system could be considered democratic as long as there is free competition of ideas and policies within the ruling party. In practice, however, such parties monopoly has led to authoritarianism and dictatorship. Without competition from other political parties, the party in power has tended to operate excessively making the leaders a small, tyrannical elite³.

In most cases, the motive behind single party system and the reasons for political regimes to pursue such a route was historical, political and ideological. In Africa especially, the familiar historical legacy that preceded independence was the rule of minority over majority. During the Cold War era, the priority by Western states for economic and national ties meant that corrupt regimes elsewhere were supported despite their record on human rights violations and absence of democracy. When the Cold War ended, governments made reluctant moves to embrace multiparty democracy. The win-lose nature of multiparty competition acted as an important element in reducing the willingness of those in power to concede electoral victory to opposition. Reluctance in itself was a pointer to the fragility of the basis for competitive politics. While politicians in power viewed multipartyism with suspicion, academics too contested its validity.

The Two Party System

Sometimes, multiparty systems are so thoroughly dominated by the two largest parties that they effectively become a two-party system, despite there being other political parties which neither have the opportunity to form government nor make any impact on government policies. This has been the case for the United States of America for most of its history, with the Democratic and the Republican Parties dominating the national and state legislatures. Britain too has been a two party system for forty years following the second world war. However, dissatisfaction with polarized politics led in the 1980s to the formation of the Liberal Democratic Party which has a substantial following.⁴ In Kenya, there have been suggestions that a two party system would reduce the ethnic nature of political parties by forcing the emergence of ethno-linguistic coalitions.

Uganda's Movement or No-Party System⁵

Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni is among contemporary African leaders who have openly stated the dilemmas and problems associated with multi-

party politics. He believes that Uganda (a country greatly haunted by its past: dictatorship, failed multiparty politics and protracted guerrilla rebellion) is not ready for a 'Western-style multiparty system'. The move to such politics, he notes, leads to animosities and conflict based on ethnicity. His alternative has been a *no-party* system also known as the "Movement system," derived from the National Revolutionary Movement that brought him to power in 1986. For its proponents, the system is a broad based, inclusive and has a non-partisan framework given to participatory democracy but without competing parties. In the no-party electoral alternative, competing candidates vie for votes as individuals and not as members of a party, though most belong to the ruling NRM.

The question is how accountability is assured, and how political and ethnic minorities express their views on economic well-being and resource distribution. The apparent danger is that the arguments for no-party democracy could be used to justify the monopoly of power with the NRM as a *ruling party*. In such a case it is no alternative, just another name for single-party rule.

The NRM has been in power for over for 15 years and it does not seem to have a decent exit strategy as President Museveni himself is quoted as saying: 'I'm not ready to hand over power to people or groups of people who have no ability to manage a nation Why should I sentence Ugandans to suicide by handing over power to people we fought and defeated? It's dangerous despite the fact that the constitution allows them to run against me.... At times the constitution may not be the best tool to direct us politically for it allows wrong and doubtful people to contest for power'. (Addressing a rally in western Uganda. *The East African*, 12 February 2001).

Multi-Party Democracy

Multi-Party Democracy in Africa must be seen in its contextual reality. Seyoum Hameso in *Issues & Dilemmas of Multi-Party Democracy in Africa* describes Africa as a continent three times the size of the United States, which has fifty-three states. Africa's 800 million people trace their roots from over 2000 different ethnic groups with different languages of their own. The slave trade and colonial rule perversely affected it's development possibilities. Arbitrary and illogical carving of the boundaries irrespective of the social and natural divisions of geography and population settlement harnessed profound national identity crisis. This weak foundation has had an impact on the political systems

which have remained much in the making of the colonial order, swimming in the sea of *conquest politics*.

Multiparty politics was touted as a recipe for conflict. And indeed different rounds of multiparty elections across Africa have been punctuated with political violence resulting in violation of human rights and large scale displacement of people.

Seyoum Hameso, therefore, argues that multiparty democracy, being a political culture, needs a suitable atmosphere for its promotion. It cannot be imposed lest it produces a different variety of politics. The culture of democracy (tolerance of dissent, representation, consultation and consensus) needs to develop from the grassroots. This stands in stark contrast to the most recent political culture in Africa characterized by intolerance, discrimination and contempt for the common person and particularly for “unlettered” rural residents. Reversing these sort of political attitudes requires time, even generations, as well as a good measure of education and information about democracy.

There are three essential conditions for a multiparty democracy to function.⁶ These are:

- a) extensive competition by contestants including individuals, groups or parties for government;
- b) political participation that provides the choice for the electorate to select candidates in free and fair elections; and
- c) civil and political liberties that enable citizens to express themselves without fear of punishment.

Where is Kenya in the process of democratization? Are we still at the transition to some kind of multi-party democracy with constitutional rights or are we at the stage of consolidation of constitutional democracy and the improvement of its quality from normative points of view? Whichever the stage, what are the institutional choices that could best contribute to such results? What is the role of the political parties in the Kenyan political dispensation?

The CMD-Kenya

In April 2004 following extensive consultations between Kenyan political parties and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, the CMD-Kenya was created by all the political parties in Kenya. Its core aim is to institutionalise and facilitate internal democracy within political parties so that

they can become vibrant and active participants in enhancing and perpetuating multiparty democracy in Kenya. In strengthening the institutional capacity of political parties in Kenya, CMD-Kenya hopes political parties will have capacity to promote social justice, equity and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. That, indeed, the values held dear by democratic citizens will become part and parcel of Kenyan politics.

Given Kenya's past and present political history, the CMD-Kenya is an idea whose time has come and is in fact long overdue. For the first time in Kenya, all political parties have been recognized in a different way outside elections. Representing and bringing under one umbrella all the Kenyan political parties, the CMD-Kenya, with the support of its core partner the Netherlands Institute for Multi-Party Democracy (N-IMD) has been able to set up a Trust through which all political parties are facilitated and supported in various forms. They have also put together a number of instruments to assist in the governance of the Trust and by extension the political parties. These are the Trust Deed, a set of developing By-Laws, and a Code of Conduct, in an attempt to regulate member political parties in various ways. In addition the Trust has developed a variety of working manuals – procurement, human resource, operational and finance, that regulate its operations. A participation criteria and drawing rights for available funds has also been agreed upon and has continued to determine participation and funds allocation.

Member Political Parties have developed strategic plans, and all have acquired offices and employed staff, they have bank accounts, computers and have gone through a series of training in media approaches, financial management and resource mobilization. The long-term strategy is to have institutions that are sustainable. Despite all this, it is still obvious and a critical issue that in Kenya we do not have any good example of a true political party like they have in Tanzania, South Africa or even in countries in the West.

To understand the challenges of the CMD-Kenya, we need to contextualize it within the democratic space that exists, nationally and internationally, to understand the continued challenges of multi-party politics across Africa. Finally, we need to make a 'progress' comparison with the rest of Africa and look at our own achievements over the recent years. To do this we shall look at sample results of the Afrobarometer, which includes results for Kenya.

The Afrobarometer⁷

This is an independent non partisan research project that measures the social political and economic atmosphere in Africa. Afrobarometer surveys

are conducted in more than a dozen countries and are on a regular cycle. Because the instrument asks a standard set of questions, countries can be systematically compared. Trends in public attitudes are tracked overtime. Results are shared with decision makers, policy advocates, civic educators, journalists, researchers, donors, investors as well as average citizens who wish to be more active and informed. The idea is to find out what people think and value in terms of the way their political system operates and their ideal of how it should be structured.

The results show that two-thirds of Africans surveyed in this multi-country survey associate democracy with civil liberties, popular sovereignty, or electoral choice, not simply the provision of higher incomes or social services. And about two-thirds of Africans surveyed say that democracy is always preferable to authoritarian rule. About the same percentage reject all possible alternatives to democracy: one-party rule, military rule, one-man rule. Even those who are dissatisfied with the way democracy is working in their country still believe that it is the best form of government.

Ignoring the People

Most Africans feel that their elected leaders generally fail to pay attention to the people. Majorities in 16 of the countries (overall average at 66 percent) surveyed by Afrobarometer said lawmakers “never” or “only sometimes” listened to what “people like you have to say.” The conviction that lawmakers were unresponsive was most prevalent among Kenyans (82%), Zambians (81%) and Zimbabweans, Tanzanians and Madagascans (77%). Locally elected officials got slightly higher marks. Majorities in 13 countries said they were unresponsive, especially in Zambia (76%), Kenya (73%) and Zimbabwe (72%). Only in Mali did a majority (53%) say locally elected councillors often or always paid attention to their concerns.

The *GlobeScan* poll got similar results. On average more than half (56%) said the people’s will did not prevail in their countries. This perception was strongest in Nigeria (85%) and Zimbabwe (73%). Only in Ghana did a clear majority (61%) say their government was representative.

The survey shows that many African countries, including Kenya, are negating the principles of democracy, despite the country having a multi-party political system in principle. As a country therefore we are failing in delivering the full democratic package and Kenyans are aware of this. Examples include

the opaque nature of the appointment of the East African Legislative Assembly, in 2005, and the appointment of the Electoral Commission Officers in January 2006, in total disregard of the wishes of citizens as expounded by political party leadership, religious organizations, the Law Society of Kenya and other civil society organizations confirm as the survey says, that the present Kenyan political leadership has failed to give enough credence to the role of political parties and is not listening to the people.

The Political Party

A political party should be seen as a living organism with a soul, a mind, a body and a multiplicity of limbs, a perception missing within Kenya political parties. That a party with an ideology, a social philosophy and policies has a soul and mind! This intriguing statement was made by Mzee Kingunge Ngombale-Mwiru, Minister of State in the Office of the President in Tanzania, responsible for Political Affairs and Social Relations. This was in his speech to participants of a regional political parties conference organized by the Netherlands Institute for Multi-Party democracy, in Dar Es Salaam in December 2006. The political party needed to have members who understood the needs of the soul so as to permeate this ideology, the social philosophy and policies within the party organizational structure which he described as the body.

To emphasize his point on the living organism that is a political party, Minister Mwiru correctly captured what we know here in Kenya, that there are two types of politicians. First are those that take political parties for granted, especially once they get to parliament. They literally dump their parties to pick them up again a few months to the general election. Second is the category which considers political parties as personal property, where they do things in unorthodox style. Clearly, within the two categories, there is no set of leaders that could be called patriotic. This means that as Kenyans to-date we are getting a raw deal from our political parties and by extension parliamentarians. The few genuine ones trying to survive in this sea of 'anarchism' are hidden to our eyes, because somehow we seem as a people to be impatient with order and prefer that which displays all manner of fanfare rather than rules, regulations and ideological appeal.⁸

In democratic societies, orderly competition for power is the definitive function of political parties. Parties offer ideologies and programmes that the public can choose whether to support or not. Party members and their leaders have certain common aspirations, principles and policies, and they join

together in a political party mainly in order to sell their ideas to their fellow citizens. The ultimate goal is to put these ideas into practice in government and for the good of the nation. Parties field candidates in elections so that the aspirations, principles, and policies of the party can be implemented through government programmes.⁹ Very few of the Kenyan political parties have any members to speak of and therefore a core part of the political party is missing. Minister Mwiru's speech had emphasized that the 'party member is the most critical element of the party. They can recreate the party and defend its soul and mind through an effective organizational structure'. He described the membership as the multiplicity of limbs that play the functionality role in the body¹⁰.

Financing of political parties

One of the great challenges facing political reformers is that little is known about the details of money in political parties or in campaigns. Political party financing patterns are extremely opaque, and the decisions about raising and spending money are usually controlled and managed by only a few individuals. Relatively few politicians could provide concrete details about party funding operations. Even when such funds are raised from legitimate sources, the challenge has been poor party fund management, often related to weak organizational structure and lack of internal democratic practices¹¹.

Currently, Kenya has no regulatory framework governing political party finance or campaign expenditures. Efforts to introduce public financing for political parties have resulted in the drafting of the Political Parties Bill, which awaits discussion and ratification in parliament. All political parties big and small agree on the need for public party financing. A new regulatory framework for political party operations and financing is expected to come into force before the next General Election set for December 2007.

Whilst it is paramount that legitimate political party financing is made available to parties, the implementation of these systems should be tied to, or made conditional upon, reform of political party systems. This has been one of the main challenges of the CMD-Kenya, working with political parties that have no clue how to account for funds for legitimate programmes. The history is that they have not really had structured or legitimate programmes that they needed to account for other than elections and related campaigns.

Existence of autocracy within a Multi-Party system

Although many countries continue to ‘practice’ multi-party politics and elections, the stark reality is that most systems allow autocratic rulers to remain in office using electoral procedures as rituals to divide and rule and stay in power. In-fact Joseph Schumpeter made an observation that democracy does not entail rule by the people but it is “a method by which decision-making is transferred to individuals who have gained power in a competitive struggle for the votes of the citizens.”¹² It is clear that once power transfer is understood in that sense, then the original meaning and ideals of democracy remain corrupted.

This practice has found space in the CMD-Kenya, where although in principle the Trust is supposed to give an example towards democratic values as defined earlier and therefore encourage tolerance and inclusivity, the reality is that it has pursued a ‘winner-take-all’ election outcome where in-fact the electors can decide, and have done in the past, to exclude other political parties from participating in the spirit for which the CMD-Kenya was created.

External national politics have found their space in the CMD-Kenya and a re-look at the instruments that govern the organization to assist in removing any trait of polarization requires urgent attention. At the CMD-Kenya, it is imperative to not only concentrate on the party as an institution but also look at the cultural-political environment that influences the quality and the vitality of democratic politics without ignoring global political trends that influence domestic politics.

Ethnicity and Multi-Party Politics

The prime pretext for incumbent leaders to undermine the case for multiparty democracy is that it is a recipe for ethnic conflict.¹³ Where ideas and principles grounded on the interest of society are lacking, and where there are deep-rooted ethnic divisions, the electorate (often non-literate) are provided with two rigid choices: electing persons that belong to one’s group who speak the same language, share the same culture, history and prejudice, while deselecting “others” who are from ‘remote’ areas, speak ‘unintelligible’ languages, have different cultures, and at times contrasting interpretations of history. (This is not peculiar to Africa as the same happens to electoral processes in deeply divided societies of the West).

In Kenyan politics, personalities continue to matter more than a political organization or its objectives. The Kenyan elections of 1992 and 1997 confirm that the majority of Kenyans voted along personality and ethnic lines. While there was a marked difference in 2002, the ruling coalition broke soon after as individual leaders resorted to ethnic politics as leverage to political bargaining and continuity of relevance. This demonstrates that even when the parties are trans-ethnic, multiparty elections are still fraught with ethnic manipulation. Most political parties are registered with a national outlook but end up resorting to ethnic alignment as a tactic of political survival. Therefore even thinking of banning or discouraging ethnic political parties may not come in as a handy solution.

And indeed as the contemporary states in Africa increasingly fail in the protection, support and provision of basic services, people resort to non-formal arrangements such as “voluntary” self-help associations, some of them of an ethnic nature. Infact history has shown that the resilience of ethnicity becomes distinctly visible during political crises and in turn it offers an economic protective shield in the “retreat from urban decline to rural survival in ethnic homeland.”¹⁴ But it is actually when multiparty democracy fails to democratise the state that ethnicity serves as an alternative organizing principle of social justice and change.¹⁵

It is possible to create additional measures that relate to power-sharing arrangements including the establishment of political and administrative units to suit such arrangements as federalism, regional autonomy, and autonomous group rights. This entails incorporating ethnic associations and groups and their recognition as legitimate political actors. It is noted that “in multiethnic societies such as Mauritius and Botswana, where ethnic groups are recognized as legitimate and feel secure about their future, ethnic politics can be compatible with democracy.”¹⁶ The recognition of group political rights reassures ethnic minorities about their liberties and security, reducing the incentive for civil war, secession, and the defence of co-ethnic across their borders.¹⁷

Within the CMD-Kenya, mainly because of the nature and quality of representation of political parties, ethnicity too is being played out where lobbying strategies deliberately keep out certain ethnic groups, not necessarily minorities, acting out the national politics and settling imagined ethnic and political scores. Tokenism of positions has been used to cover up the real

intention of the electors. These are issues that need to be guarded against early enough before the organization negates its very purposes of uniting political actors under one umbrella for the good of the nation.

Political pluralism does offer an opportunity for democracy to flourish. Through a convergence of diverse ideas and public participation, democracy can be entrenched. In most African countries there are challenges related to ethnicity, weak political parties, and the politics of patronage. In Kenya, strides are being made to give democratic culture a chance but the journey is still long and rough. The arts can contribute immensely in promoting multiparty democracy and in addressing these issues and opening up opportunities for every citizen to enjoy the fruits of real freedom. They can engage the nation on issues of ethnicity, coalitions and political parties, and the pursuit of power.

Notes

- ¹ Claude Ake. 1993. 'Rethinking African Democracy'. In Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (ed.) *The global resurgence of democracy*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- ² Professor Larry Diamond, 2004 while discussing *Universal Democracy? Prospects for a World Transformed* with Joanne Myers.
- ³ IED: an audit; Political Party Organisation & Management in Kenya. Nairobi, pp 8
- ⁴ Ibid pp 10
- ⁵ Doornbos 2000:109 in *Issues & Dilemmas of Multi-Party Democracy in Africa* *
- ⁶ Robert Dahl in *Issues & Dilemmas of Multi-Party Democracy in Africa* *
- ⁷ Bratton, Mattes and Boadi, 2003: Afrobarometer; Africa Public Opinion Research Home Page Reports, Cambridge University Press.
- ⁸ Njeri Kabeberi-Kanene; in the Sunday Standard, Dec 2006
- ⁹ IED: an audit; Political Party Organisation & Management in Kenya
- ¹⁰ Njeri Kabeberi-Kanene; column in the Sunday Standard, Dec 2006
- ¹¹ National Democratic Institute for International Affairs; Money in Politics, a study of party financing practices in 22 countries
- ¹² Schumpeter 1942; Cranenburgh 2000:22 in *Issues & Dilemmas of Multi-Party Democracy in Africa* *
- ¹³ Seyoum Hameso; 2001 in *Issues & Dilemmas of Multi-Party Democracy in Africa*, West Africa Review;
- ¹⁴ Shaw 1986:591 in Seyoum Hameso; 2001 *Issues & Dilemmas of Multi-Party Democracy in Africa* *
- ¹⁵ Nnoli 1993:222) in Seyoum Hameso; 2001 *Issues & Dilemmas of Multi-Party Democracy in Africa* *

- ¹⁶ Rothchild 2000:6 in Seyoum Hameso; 2001 *Issues & Dilemmas of Multi-Party Democracy in Africa**
- ¹⁷ Talbott 2000:160 in Seyoum Hameso; 2001 *Issues & Dilemmas of Multi-Party Democracy in Africa**

*All references are also part of the article by Seyoum Hameso; in *Issues & Dilemmas of Multi-Party Democracy in Africa*

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Cultural Production and Social Change in Kenya

Building Bridges

Art, Culture and Society Vol 1 is the first in a series of books to be published by Twaweza Communications on the relationship between art and society, with special reference to Kenya. It is part of a cultural leadership initiative being undertaken by the organization through a reexamination of the arts as they are produced and studied. This Volume brings together important reflections on the arts and is a major step in encouraging dialogue on the relationship between creativity and the human condition in the region. Significantly, it creates a space for academicians who are based in universities to engage in dialogue with artists and writers based outside institutions of higher learning. The conversations will bridge the gap between the two domains for knowledge production and hopefully enrich the creative enterprise in Kenya, in theory and practice.

As the essays in this collection show, the present global situation demands a way to conceptualize and theorize an ever growing cultural interconnectedness, sometimes manifested in art; an interconnection that draws from a myriad of cultures and experiences. Through the bridges of contact and cultural exchange distant images are mediated and brought closer to us. They are reinterpreted and modified. In the final analysis, culture is shown to be an important aspect of human creativity but its separateness and boundedness is contested. Instead, culture is shown to be malleable and fluid. The essays bring in a new freshness to our reading of the creative arts coming out of Kenya.



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